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The Rival Monte Cristos: or, The Frenchman's Play for High Stakes.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.



THE SPRING WAS TOUCHED AND VICTIM NUMBER ONE WAS HURLED INTO THE AIR.

CHAPTER I.

A CRAFT OF ILL-OMEN.

"COME, men! this is unmanly to desert me, just as I order my anchor up," and the speaker,

a handsome young man clad in sailor garb, looked down upon the dozen seamen who were gathered at the wharf.

The men remained silent.

The piercing eyes of the young captain ran over the group and then glanced at his decks, upon which three persons were visible—one a young and beautiful girl, she seemed; another,

The Rival Monte Cristos.

a distinguished-looking man with a foreign face; and the third a tall, peculiar-framed negro in white cap and apron.

"Men, why do you desert me in this way? Speak, Mate Matson, for I believe you led in the cowardly act!" and the eyes of the speaker flashed as he turned them upon his mate, who stood among the deserting seamen.

"If you must have answer, Captain Kennon, then it's because the brig's haunted," was the reply.

"Haunted? Bah! you are a set of cowards!"

"No, we don't fear nothing human, Captain Kennon, but we are afraid o' that craft, and I wouldn't sail in her again for a fortune," declared the mate, boldly, and a chorus came from the seamen indorsing their deserting officer's decision.

"This brig haunted, and by what?"

"She was the craft which you captured, sir, when you was a lieutenant in the navy, and then she was the pirate brig Vampire."

"Granted, and what then, Matson?"

"Her decks have been stained with innocent blood, sir, and her cabin has been the home of Brule, the Buccaneer, whose red deeds were the terror of honest seamen for years."

"What the brig once was matters not, for she has been overhauled and refitted; we have made several successful voyages in her; she is fleet as the wind, stanch as a line-of-battle ship, and you are a pack of cowards to desert her now."

"The spirits of them slain by Brule, the Buccaneer, sir, still haunt her, and I had a dream of ill-fortune to us all, and so left her, and the lads come with me."

"Matson, you are a superstitious fool. You see that I carry my young bride with me; and my passenger here, and Paul do not desert me."

"But away with you all, for I can get men who do not fear to go in a haunted craft!" cried the young ex-lieutenant.

As the young skipper spoke a man advanced from a group of sailors standing further back on the wharf.

They had evidently heard what had been said, and choosing a spokesman he came forward and said:

"There's a party of us, sir, as wants to ship, and if you'll pay well we'll take the chances with the sea-spirits."

The man's face was not a prepossessing one, and the group he represented were not as natty and honest-looking a lot of tars as were those who had deserted from the brig; but the captain could not be over-particular, then, so replied:

"Well said, my man, and I'll give you double wages for the voyage, and I need a dozen men, so hasten to get your kits and come on board, for I sail at once."

The man returned to his comrades, and with a cheer they went after their kits, returning quickly so that the brig got up sail at once and sped away with many an ominous shake of the head from Mate Matson and those who had deserted her, when they found out that she had been the Vampire sea-craft of Brule, the Buccaneer.

"She's a beauty, that's certain," said one who saw her bend gracefully to the breeze and fly down New York Harbor toward the open sea.

"Yes, and she sails like a witch," remarked another of the deserters.

"And her captain is as true a sailor and gallant gentleman as ever trod a quarter-deck," a third rejoined.

"Yes, and I wonder why he left the navy so suddenly, for he was rising fast in rank."

"They say he was once rich as a lord, but was disowned by his father."

"His wife's a beauty and no mistake."

"And a lady, though there's something mysterious about her."

"I has heard that he found her a captive on a pirate ship."

"I pity her, yes, and all of 'em who sails on that craft."

"And so do I, lads, for the Rover Queen, pretty craft though she is, will never reach a port, mark my words on it, for I know," and the speaker, Mate Matson, upon whose face rested a strange look, as though he knew more than he cared to tell, walked quietly away, jingling in his pocket a handful of gold, while he muttered to himself:

"It was not enough, and I should have demanded more for what I did, for the face of the captain's young wife haunts me as I remember how she looked when the brig swung out in the stream."

"Bah! I was a fool to be bought so cheap, for already is remorse upon me when I think of her."

"I'll go and drown my thoughts in a bottle of rum; but when the gold is gone, I can get no rum and what will I do then to keep grim phantoms out of heart and brain? Yes, I was a fool."

So saying Mate Matson hastened on his way to drown remorse in drink, for he had done a great wrong, and conscience already upbraided him for it.

CHAPTER II.

REMORE.

No grander homestead overlooked the majestic Hudson River, than Cloudlands, the home of the Kennons for generations.

The family had come from England, it was said, over a century before (I write of a time in the early years of this country), and, a man of means, the elder Kennon had built his home upon a hill-top, with gently-sloping sides, and from which a grand view could be obtained far and wide, of distant mountains, hills, valleys and the river.

He had well named it Cloudlands, and he had wisely invested in thousands of acres surrounding him.

With the early history of the Kennons we have little to do, as our story is with father and son of the last two generations.

The father had been a stern man, living the life of a recluse, after he had returned from years of sea life.

He had been, with a twin brother, the only children of their parents, and one night, in crossing the Hudson the two boys had been capsized, and one was drowned.

This it was, so people said, that made Richard Kennon a silent, austere man through life, for he had dearly loved his brother.

He had gone to sea in one of his father's vessels, and long after, when his parents were dead, Captain Kennon had returned to Cloudlands with a wife.

His wife had died early in life leaving one child, a son, Dunbar Kennon, and though the father without doubt loved his boy his nature was cold and there was no sympathy between them.

Captain Kennon allowed Cloudlands to almost go to ruin, the lawns and gardens to become weed-grown, and with two old servants he passed his days in exile, as it were, seeing no one and going nowhere.

His acres increased in value; he grew richer and richer; but he lived his lonely life, for he got his son a middy's berth in the navy at an early age.

The boy seldom cared to return home, for his father kept to himself and never a sign of affection was there shown to the young middy, who was glad to keep at sea, for he really seemed hardly to know his father, and Cloudlands was as gloomy as the grave.

Thus the years passed away, until suddenly there came a change, and a startling one, over the master of Cloudlands.

He came out of his recluse life, accepted the guardianship of a beautiful young girl, Valerie Rossmore, a distant kinswoman, he said, and an heiress.

Cloudlands was wholly metamorphosed, fitted up, refurnished and made very beautiful and luxurious.

Servants were hired, the stables were filled with horses and carriages, and when Valerie Rossmore arrived she found a most luxurious home.

Dunbar, then a lieutenant in the navy, was written to in a kind, affectionate manner and told to get a leave and come home, which he was glad to do, for the barrier between his father and himself had not been of his setting up.

There were other fine homes about Cloudlands and aristocratic old families, and these were invited to meet Valerie Rossmore upon her coming to Cloudlands.

Very beautiful, with large black eyes, long lashes, red-gold hair and a form of exquisite grace, as well as being an heiress, it was no wonder that Valerie Rossmore at once won the hearts of the young aristocrats.

Among her visitors was a young man who possessed a large estate.

His home was Cedar Hall, next in its grandeur to Cloudlands, and he was looked upon as "a great catch" in the neighborhood.

He had been a middy in the navy with Dunbar Kennon, but, for some reason never known, he had suddenly resigned and come home to live a bachelor existence in Cedar Hall, for he had no near kinsfolk.

Frank Fairfield, for such was his name, was looked upon as the successful suitor for the hand of Valerie Rossmore ere she had been six months at Cloudlands; then Dunbar Kennon, handsome, fascinating and covered with honors for distinguished service, came home.

From that day Frank Fairfield ceased his daily visits to Cloudlands, and it came out that he and Dunbar Kennon had not been on speaking terms since they were midshipmen together.

Upon the subject Dunbar Kennon had nothing to say; but it was soon rumored that Valerie was

"Off with the old love
And on with the new,"

and that the lieutenant and she were engaged.

Then had Frank Fairfield ridden over to Cloudlands, when the rumor came to his ears, a scene had followed, a duel followed the scene, and Dunbar Kennon left suddenly to rejoin his ship, leaving his rival hovering between life and death from a sword-thrust.

In the duel Captain Kennon had seconded his son, and Monsieur Pierre Gerard, a sword-master and half-servant who lived with Frank in Cedar Hall, had been his second.

It was said that Dunbar Kennon had first spared the life of his rival, but, as another bout was demanded, had run him through.

And so, back to his ship went the naval officer, while Frank Fairfield, at his own request, was borne to River Vale Farm, the home of a half-farmer, half-Hudson River skipper, whose beautiful daughter had once saved the life of the wounded duelist.

Rumor had it, too, that they—Frank Fairfield and Di Douglass, the skipper's daughter, had been engaged until Valerie Rossmore appeared at Cloudlands, when the master of Cedar Hall at once forgot his old love.

So to Di Douglass's home he was taken, and there he lingered for long weeks, only her devoted nursing saving his life.

And Dunbar Kennon went away engaged to Valerie Rossmore, greatly to the delight of his father, and thus matters stood nearly a year after the well-nigh fatal duel.

Pirate-hunting in the southern seas, Dunbar Kennon knew not whether Frank Fairfield was dead or alive; but he received a letter calling him home to his father, who was ill.

With his faithful negro servant, Paul, he had started, been wrecked upon an island which had proven to be the haunt of a strange people, escaped through the Buccaneer Queen falling in love with him, and then started on his way to Cloudlands, accompanied by his wife, Zulita, the Queen of the Island Rovers, whom a strange fatality had caused him to wed.

In the mean time, the health of Captain Kennon had steadily failed, and it seemed that he had gone back into his old way of living, for he saw no one other than Valerie, his lawyer and doctor.

He turned night into day, never closing his eyes during the hours of darkness, and keeping an attendant constantly with him.

So the days passed away, and no word came from the absent son.

At last all knew that the day of his demise could not be far distant; but he clung to his library and easy-chair, refusing to take to his bed.

One night, to the attendant's surprise, he dismissed him and remained alone.

Stern, haggard, and with no bodily ailment it seemed, only some hidden grief wearing out the soul, he sat alone for awhile in silence, motionless as a statue; then from his lips broke the words:

"Remorse! remorse! how cruel you are! But, I will not yield to you and make confession, for if I do, all his lost, all that I struggled for, revenge, riches, and for her sake to be what I am!"

"Not all the horrid past comes before me as does that scene upon the river-bank when he died by my hand."

"God in heaven! there is no mercy for such as I, and I will not ask forgiveness. The end is near, but none know the fearful secret, and it shall die with me; yes, the grave shall hide it forever from sight."

"He will return; he will marry her and they will be happy, for she has made him her idol, and how could he help loving her? They will possess vast wealth, and I will lie in my grave with the seal of death holding back my hideous secret."

"Phantoms of the past have been about me by day and night, and I have dared not to be alone; but now, the icy touch of death is upon me and I fear no longer. A short while more and I shall die, and then all will be well."

As he spoke the rumble of wheels was heard, and, soon after, Valerie Rossmore glided into the room.

She was as white as marble, and her lips quivered.

"He has come," she said in a hoarse voice.

"My son?"

"Yes."

"Bring him at once to me, Valerie."

"Not just now, for I would tell you that Dunbar Kennon does not come alone!"

"What mean you?"

"He comes with one who he says saved his life, rescued him from pirates, and he has made her his wife!"

"Curses fall upon him living and dead! He has deceived you and married another? Then by the Heaven above but I shall disinherit and disown him!"

"I left all in your name, believing you were to be married on his return, and for you to transfer it to him; but in case he should die, then you possessed all."

"Send for my lawyer and witnesses and I will add a codicil to my will cutting him off without a dollar!"

"Curses upon Dunbar Kennon, I say!"

He spoke in a voice hoarse with passion. Valerie obeyed his bidding, and the lawyer was sent for.

Then the son entered, hoping to be forgiven, but he was met by bitter curses, and was driven from Cloudlands with his young wife, disinherited, disowned, while Richard Kennon signed his name boldly to his changed will, and then died, the seal of death being put upon the weird secret which he held locked up in his bosom, and which seemed to have brought upon him such fearful remorse.

Driven from home, with his faithful wife and the negro Paul, Dunbar Kennon sought to earn

an honest living, uttering no word of reproach against his father, feeling no envy or hatred against Valerie who had become the possessor of his rightful inheritance.

With what money he had he purchased the pirate brig Vampire, changed her into a packet vessel, naming her the Rover Queen, and the reader has seen him set sail in her with a strange crew, and heard the forebodings of evil that would come upon her ere the voyage was ended.

CHAPTER III.

MAZULA, A SEA KING.

In the Caribbean Sea there is an island which in the early years of the present century was the home of a strange and lawless people.

To one on the deck of a vessel sailing by, the island seemed not to be inhabited, but to look like a desolate abiding-place, for it was encircled by a ragged reef in which there was but one opening, and this opposite a cliff.

The reef was about a quarter of a mile from the island all the way around, and broke the force of the waves, serving as a breakwater, while a vessel once passing through the channel could sail around one-half of the isle to where a lagoon or inlet put into it for a few hundred yards.

In this lagoon or inlet, which was not more than a hundred feet wide and fed by streams from the hills in the interior, were anchored or moored against the shore, at the time the reader is taken to the scene, a number of craft, ranging from swift-sailing *goletas* of a hundred and fifty tons to smallest skiffs.

This little fleet of half a hundred vessels was the squadron of the dwellers upon the island, and there were a dozen of the larger craft that were armed with pivot-guns fore and aft, or a small battery.

Upon the decks of these vessels only a few loungers were visible, and as the lagoon had a bend in it, no one cruising around the island would have thought that an armed fleet was hidden away there.

The interior of the isle was dotted with groves of trees, from the tapering, graceful pine to the orange and palm, and the cliffs and ridges had a stunted growth that gave them a barren look from without.

But the valley was large, had a crystal stream running through it, and emptying into the lagoon, while around its border, on the slopes, were a hundred or more cabins, built mostly from the wreckage of vessels.

In the center of the valley was a round house, with peaked, thatched roof, and it was painted a bright scarlet, bordered with black, and no windows, except the skylights in the roof, and but one door.

Above this odd house was a flag floating, a black field, with a white skeleton hand grasping a pair of scarlet scales.

This was the Hall of Justice, the place where the Three Wise Men, as the trio of dignitaries were called who presided over the minor affairs of the remarkable people who dwelt upon the island.

Upon the hill near the cliff, which commanded the entrance through the reef, was an odd residence, for it was built in the shape of a vessel, with masts and rigging.

At the mizzen-top floated a flag with a blue field, in the center of which was an eye of gold, and above it a pair of spread white wings.

On the cliff, seen from the valley, but masked from the sea, was a fort, in which were several ship's heavy guns mounted and commanding the channel, and another fortress commanded the lagoon from a height over it.

About the cabins were a number of people, men, women and children, all clad in a picturesque costume, and wearing a profusion of jewelry.

Their faces were dark, and generally handsome, their forms elegant, yet sinewy, and they looked like a daring, resolute people of the sea.

Fully a thousand in number, they were yet an outcast, outlaw people, roaming at will from island to island the world over, and always keeping their retreat hidden as much as was in their power.

They were said to be pirates, wreckers, smugglers, and all else that was bad; yet it was seldom that one of their fleet craft was caught in an act of buccaneering.

Still they were constantly watched by the cruisers of all nations—were these Island Rovers, as they were called.

Over the Island Rovers a ruler, who had been called King, had held sway during the three generations which they had been in existence as a people.

It was said that the founder of the League had been a pirate chief, who, with his crew, had settled upon an island and all had married their captives.

The next ruler was the son of this old pirate, and the third was, at his death, his daughter, who was known as Queen Zulita.

Bound together by most terrible oaths, the Island Rovers looked not for traitors in their midst, and none were suspected of being, until after the supposed death of Queen Zulita by sui-

cide, the King who succeeded her made a discovery that was most startling to him.

King Mazula was no ordinary man, but rather an extraordinary personage.

He was chief of the fleet and land forces under Queen Zulita, and had been noted as a splendid sailor and one possessed of indomitable courage.

Tall, well-formed and handsome he was, with a full silken beard and hair worn long and curling.

He had been selected by the Three Wise Men, according to the law of the Island Rovers, to be the husband of Queen Zulita, and thus become King, and it was expected that their marriage would follow soon, when one night the beautiful young ruler, and her maid, Lazuli, had disappeared, a note being left to imply that they had taken their own lives by springing over the Death Cliff.

On the same night there was to be an execution of two prisoners, who had been wrecked upon the island, and about the same time one of the vessels of the fleet, used as a cruiser craft to communicate with the different Rover cruisers, disappeared, and was supposed to have foundered at sea with all on board.

It was a hard blow to the Island Rovers, to lose their Queen, and yet, not one seemed to hold a suspicion that she might be living, or to connect her death and the missing vessel together, nor to suspect that the executioner, who alone was to drive the two prisoners at midnight to take the Death Leap over the cliff, had not done his duty.

But, one night, some months after he had become King, Mazula was looking over a private desk which had belonged to Queen Zulita, and what he discovered there caused his dark handsome face to turn livid with emotion, while he ground his white teeth with rage.

CHAPTER IV.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

WHAT the handsome young King of the Island Rovers discovered was a letter among other papers cast aside in the little desk, which had been the secret repository of the late Queen for all important documents.

This letter bore no address, and yet it was signed by Queen Zulita; but for whom it was intended the contents most conclusively proved.

Over and over again did Mazula read this letter, which seemed to have been the first one written upon which she addressed the person she was writing to, and she had evidently copied it, sending the latter instead of the original one.

After awhile, as though his mind was made up to his course, Mazula arose and left his quarters.

His steps led him to the fort, where dwelt the commandant, Señor Ramon, and who was also the doctor of the Islanders.

This personage was an important character among the Island Rovers, and he was supposed, from his position as physician, to have been deeper in the confidence of all than any one else among the Islanders.

Señor Ramon was a man of ordinary height, with a compact form, a quick, nervous manner, and yet one who possessed great dignity of manner.

His face was a study, for not a feature of it could be read other than that there was the stamp of indomitable pluck and resolution in every outline.

There was also a stern look upon his face that bordered upon severity, and yet it was at times softened by sadness which seemed to show that he had suffered some great sorrow.

A man of education and refinement, he seemed out of place there among the Island Rovers, and yet a number of them were not the coarse natures which might be expected among a lawless people.

"Ah, my King, I feel honored by your visit. Be seated, please, and say how I can serve you," said Señor Ramon.

And at a glance his keen eye told him that Mazula had something of importance to communicate.

"Señor Ramon, I have come to have a talk with you, and it is about Queen Zulita," said the Outlaw King, in an impressive manner.

Señor Ramon made no reply, but simply bowed, while his face showed not the slightest sign of emotion, if the words of Mazula caused him to feel any.

"Let us review the days of her life, Señor Ramon, just prior to her taking off."

"Yes, my King; though it is sad to talk of our dear dead Queen."

"If she is dead, señor."

"Ah, my King, can you believe otherwise?"

"Yes; and it may be sadder to know that she is not dead."

"My King, you are not well, and the worry of your office as our ruler has made you ill, I fear. A cruise in your flagship would help you, my King."

"I am not ill, Señor Ramon, but perfectly well; but I will tell you that I am deeply worried, for, I verily believe that Queen Zulita is alive."

Señor Ramon shook his head and looked at the King as though he deemed him out of his mind.

"Ramon, do you remember that Queen Zulita saw from the cliff one day a small bulk driving upon the rocks surrounding this island after a severe storm?"

"Yes, my King."

"She went in her surf-skiff to the rescue of two persons, whom she saw on board, and, when the wreck went to pieces on the reef, she saved them from death."

"I remember, my King."

"This was just before her birthday anniversary, which was celebrated by our people as a gala occasion."

"Yes, my King."

"The two men whom the Queen Zulita rescued proved to be an American naval officer and his slave, a negro."

"The officer reported that he had been blown out to sea in a small boat, while going from his cruiser to head off a north-bound packet-ship, and wrecked in a storm had been driven upon an island."

"I recall his words, my King."

"He was a magnificent specimen of manhood, handsome, bold, and the very one to win a maiden's heart."

"Though Queen Zulita was my promised bride, I saw that he made a deep impression upon her, and I sought to get rid of him that night, by forcing him and his slave to take the Death Leap over the cliff, enveloped in chains."

"I know that you did, my King."

"The Queen Zulita, however, prevented this, and they were given a chance to save their lives the next day by taking the Death Oath to become one of us."

"I knew that the American officer would refuse, and he did so; and, Queen Zulita not daring to go against our laws openly, yet determined to save them."

"To save them, my King?"

"Yes."

"But as they did not take the Death Oath, she knew that they must take the Death Leap."

"True; but the girl loved the American officer, and was determined to save him if she had to break with her people; so she got her maid, Lazuli, that pretty and cunning girl, to go to her lover, Harman, the commander of our cruiser craft Spray, and arrange with him a plot to save them."

"In thinking the matter over I recall that the Spray was commanded not by a regular Island Rover, but by one who had been made captive and took the Death Oath."

"His crew of four men were the same, captives who had joined us to save their lives."

"Well, the Spray sailed, and hovered out of sight, near the Beacon Rocks, until the last night of the Queen's fête, which came on to storm, and that night Señor Luka, who then held the place you have now, was taken ill."

"I remember it, my King."

"This necessitated the executioner, Señor Morte, the Man in Red, leading the prisoners alone to take the Death Leap."

"Yes, my King."

"He said that they walked boldly to their death; but I have reason to know that he deceived us, and aided them to escape."

"You know this, my King?" asked Señor Ramon in a surprised tone.

"Yes, they did not go over the cliff, but to sea in a surf-skiff; and more—Queen Zulita, who left a letter stating that she had committed suicide, and that her faithful maid, and friend as well, Lazuli, had died with her, did nothing of the kind, but escaped in that life-boat with the American officer and his slave, joined the Spray outside, and thus parted with the Island Rovers."

"They left the impression of suicide, not to be followed, and you remember that the captain of my cruiser, the Red Rover, reported meeting the Spray, and Señor Harman reported his vessel in a leaking condition, so we considered that she had foundered in the storm that followed; but I now see the whole plot of Queen Zulita to escape, though not because she did not love our people, but she loved the American officer more."

"Can it be possible, my King, that such is the case?" asked Señor Ramon.

"It certainly is, and, Ramon, the Queen Zulita having broken her vow to her people must be hunted down."

"As you say, my King."

"But first, the executioner, Morte, the man in red, must die, for he alone knew of her plot, and reported that the American and his slave had taken the Death Leap, when, instead, they had made their escape; therefore the executioner must die, Ramon, so see to it, for I have, in a letter written by Queen Zulita to the American, the proof of all I say."

"Let the executioner die to-night, Señor Ramon," and Mazula arose and returned to his quarters, while Señor Ramon muttered to himself:

"The executioner must die to-night, my King says, and I am the executioner—the Man in Red."

CHAPTER V.

THE MAN IN RED.

THEY were iron-clad laws that governed the Island Rovers' League, and strange ones, too. One of them was that the executioner was to be unknown to all of the Rovers. He was appointed by the King, and he alone knew who he was. Dressed in scarlet, closely resembling the attire which his Satanic Majesty is accredited with wearing, he had pointed toes, long, claw-like fingers covering feet and hands, and wore an impenetrable mask.

A signal from the Fort would summon him, and he would appear, coming from no one knew where, clad in his red raiment; then he would perform his duty and go his way as mysteriously as he had come.

The old King, Zulita's father, had appointed the executioner, and in some way the young Queen had discovered just who he was, and that Ramon, the Rovers' physician, was the Man in Red.

When Mazula became King, after the supposed death of Zulita, he had made no attempt to discover just who the executioner was.

Had he cared to know he would simply have had to signal the Man in Red and ask him who he was, and he would be compelled to keep his secret.

Having discovered by a letter which Zulita had written to Dunbar Kennon, the American naval officer, her plan of escape for him and for herself, Mazula was in possession of the truth, and hence had gone to Señor Ramon with the story and the order that the executioner must die.

As Señor Ramon was himself the Man in Red, Mazula had certainly left him a most difficult task to perform, and he half-suspected that the Outlaw King was aware that he was the one who had aided Zulita and the prisoners to escape.

The executioner having had to march the American and his slave over the cliff, and reporting that they had taken the Death Leap, knew full well the secret of the young Queen, and Señor Ramon felt assured that no mercy would be shown him by the King.

He had been the friend of the old King, and though a Rover through taking the Death Oath to the League, had seemed to prefer dwelling among those strange people to returning to his home, wherever that might be.

For a long while after the departure of Mazula Señor Ramon sat in a deep quandary.

His thoughts were evidently not of the pleasantest, from the low-spoken words he now and then uttered.

"And the beautiful young Queen, doubtless happy in her love for that handsome young sailor, whose life she saved, must be hunted down by Mazula and made to feel the vengeance of the Rovers.

"And I, who aided them to escape, am ordered by my King, who I believe suspects me, to put the executioner, myself, to death.

"Well, it must be done; but how?"

For a long time he mused, and at last arose to his feet quickly, and walked down into the village of the Rovers, where he sought the cabin of one and called him aside to speak with him.

"Bruno, I wish to have a talk with you," he said, and the man's face changed color, as though he dreaded evil.

"Yes, Señor Ramon," he said, in a low voice.

"Bruno, do you recall that two years ago I discovered you in an act of guilt which would have cost you your life, had I made it known?"

"Yes, Señor Ramon, I was searching for my King's secret treasure, and you spared my life."

"Upon conditions, Bruno?"

"Yes, señor, upon conditions," and the man's voice was so low as to be hardly audible.

"I told you that I would not betray you, but that I would demand that you obey my bidding, be it what it might, whenever I commanded you."

"Yes, señor."

"Did I betray you, Bruno, by our laws, you, your parents and all of your kin would have to die, for we Rovers look upon it that the taint of a thief in a family is in the blood of all. I do not care to have the innocent suffer for your act, Bruno; but the time has come when you must be the sufferer."

"Oh, señor!"

"I am sorry for you, Bruno; but it must be."

"What must be, señor?"

"That you die."

"Señor, I crave your mercy!"

"I am merciless, Bruno."

"But my poor parents, and the others that love me?"

"I have seen to that, for you are to die in a manner that will make you known to no one, and when you have disappeared the Rovers can look upon you as lost while swimming."

"In fact, I wish you to take your clothing and leave it on the rocks, where you are often wont to bathe; then, in another suit, come to me at the Fort to-night after it is dark, and come ready to die."

"Is there no hope for me, señor?" begged the man.

"None, for you have now had two years of life by my secrecy. Do as I say, or all you love must suffer with you."

"I will come, señor," said the young man, sadly, and Señor Ramon walked away.

Two hours after, true to his promise, Bruno appeared at the Fort.

Ramon was there and greeted him with:

"Have you left your clothes upon the rocks, Bruno?"

"Yes, señor."

"Well, put on this scarlet suit."

The man shrank back, while he cried:

"It is the suit of the Man in Red."

"Yes, it will disguise you so that no one will know you, for our King will soon be here, and remember, you are to utter no word."

"I remember, señor."

He was at once dressed out in the red suit of the executioner and then loaded with chains, fastened to an iron collar about his neck and manacles upon his hands and wrists, presenting a strange, diabolical look in his Mephisto-like costume of scarlet.

"Await me here!" ordered Ramon, and he walked rapidly away toward the Flagship, as the quarters of the King were called.

Soon he returned and with him was Mazula, the King.

The moon shone brightly, and silent, motionless, except his beating heart, stood Bruno, the doomed man.

"My King, the Man in Red is prepared to take the Death Leap in punishment for his crime," said Ramon, turning to the King of the Island Rovers.

"Then let the traitor die," sternly commanded Mazula, and Ramon stepped to the side of the doomed man, while he said in a distinct voice:

"Victim, the cliff lies before you, and in punishment, loaded in irons as you are, you are to take the Death Leap into the sea, thus ending the career of a traitor Island Rover."

"March!"

At the command of Señor Ramon the Man in Red marched toward the cliff to take the fatal leap into the sea, while the King of the Island Rovers stood watching him with a merciless look upon his handsome, yet cruel face.

CHAPTER VI.

A FATAL RUSE.

THE feelings of the three men standing there on that moonlit cliff were varied indeed.

Bruno, the victim, had been a wild, reckless young Island Rover and one night had been searching for the secret treasure of the King, an act punishable with death, when he had been discovered by Ramon.

The latter had spared him on conditions, hoping to have him mend his ways, and since then his whole life had been a changed one.

When called upon by Ramon to keep those conditions he had obeyed, as has been seen, while the executioner, to save himself, made Bruno the sacrifice, and now was his executioner.

Mazula, the Island Rovers' King, was glad to see the executioner, as he believed him to be, die, for therein he got his revenge for his having aided Dunbar Kennon, the negro, Paul, and the Queen to escape.

He had sought to ask the doomed man a few questions, but Ramon had quickly said:

"I have his full confession, my King."

And, thus satisfied, the executioner's ruse, fatal to poor Bruno, was carried out.

With firm tread Bruno stepped toward the cliff, clad in his scarlet suit of Satanic cut, the chains hanging from the iron collar, about his neck and manacles upon his feet and hands clanking as he walked.

By his side, his face stern but otherwise showing no emotion as the moonlight fell upon it, walked Ramon, while the King stood near watching the doomed man move toward the fatal leap.

A few more steps, a slight hesitancy upon the cliff's brink, and Bruno leaped far out over the sea dashing fiercely against the island seventy feet below.

Down he went with fearful velocity, his chains clinking, until, with a loud plunge, he disappeared beneath the foaming waters.

Calmly to the brink of the precipice walked Mazula and stood gazing down into the sea.

"It is the end, señor."

"Yes, my King."

"What said he?"

"I gave the signal for him, my King; he came and I told him that he must die."

"You told him why?"

"Yes, my King."

"And his reply?"

"He said that, as a true Island Rover, he was ready to obey our laws."

"And he confessed, you say?"

"Yes, my King."

"Tell me his confession."

"It was as you said you had discovered, that he aided the American to escape with his slave, and that Queen Zulita and Lazuli had awaited

in a surf-skiff to bear them to the Spray, which waited for them off Beacon Rock."

"Aha! this then was a splendid plot of Queen Zulita to escape, and all for love of that accursed American she deserted her people, leaving us to believe she had taken her own life!"

And Mazula fairly gritted his teeth with rage.

"Yes, my King, but I think she was punished for it."

"What do you mean?"

"I asked the executioner about the Queen, as to where she had gone, and he told me that she was to marry the American, and, upon reaching some port, was to convey tidings to him in some way of their safety."

"She was to do this by sending a letter by the Courier Cruiser, when it went to port for certain stores, and this letter was to be secreted in a knothole in the bowsprit of the craft, and concealed by putty. But the executioner said that no such letter had arrived, and he feared that the Queen and all had gone down upon the Spray."

"Bah! it is a story he has made up to save her; but it will not answer, for I shall at once go in search of her myself."

"You, my King?" asked Ramon, with some surprise.

"Yes, for my new schooner, the Sea Spider, will be ready for sea within the week; but, Ramon, do you know who the Man in Red was?"

"No, my King."

"Nor do I, for I never sought to discover, as I have all along half believed *you were the executioner.*"

"I hope that my King sees that he was mistaken!" said Ramon, calmly.

"I do, as I have seen the Man in Red take the Death Leap. Now, Señor Ramon, I appoint you as executioner."

"Ah, my King!"

"You have heard my words, señor?"

"I have, my King."

"And obey!"

"Yes, my King."

"So let it be, and no one can suspect the secret, not knowing that the executioner has taken the Death Leap himself; but, Señor Ramon, I shall hunt the sea and land over to find Zulita."

"Ah, my King, I believe her to be at the bottom of the sea, and it were better so."

"It were better so, for if I find her, Señor Ramon, her death shall be one of fearful torture, and, if she be living, I shall discover her; if she be dead, I shall know it," and the King of the Island Rovers spoke with a vehemence which proved that he was in deadly earnest.

"Señor Ramon, Queen Zulita took with her the secret of where the treasure of our peoples lies hidden, or she bore it away with her, for I have been unable to discover it."

"Indeed, my King?"

"Yes, and you know this secret treasure of our rulers was a vast sum."

"So our people have believed, my King."

"Well, it must be found, as well as the Queen; but, as I fear danger from that young American officer, who will doubtless come with a fleet of cruisers to attack us, I shall leave this island as soon as we can get ready to depart and call our Sea Rovers in."

"And whither will you go, my King?"

"To an island in the West Indies, whereon once I was wrecked, you remember, and then decided upon it as a retreat for our people, for in every way it is as good as this one, and also out of the track of cruising vessels. So begin to get ready, Señor Ramon, to leave this island, so that when the American and his cruisers come, sent by our traitor Queen, we will have gone," and Mazula walked away, leaving Señor Ramon much to think about.

The next morning the clothes of the unfortunate Bruno were found, and his fate bewailed, for it was believed that he was drowned while in swimming; but Mazula sought Señor Ramon and said:

"Ramon, I half-way believe that Bruno was the executioner, and left his clothes there on the rocks to hide his real fate."

"It may be, my King," was the reply, and Señor Ramon gave the King credit for getting very near to the truth and said to himself:

"I must be careful indeed, and keep an eye upon him, for he is as cunning as a fox, as relentless as a bloodhound, and if Queen Zulita can be found he will be the man to do it."

"But, so far the power is in my hand, for I hold the secrets all round, and my ruse, fatal to poor Bruno, saved me, and perhaps, in the end, may save Queen Zulita."

CHAPTER VII.

THE DISOWNED BRIDE.

VALERIE ROSSMORE appeared, so the neighbors said, to mourn deeply for her dead guardian and kinsman. He had been as a father to her, and certainly he had made her rich beyond her every hope.

The fact that Captain Kennon had disowned and disinherited his son caused comment, of course; but then the sympathy was with Va-

lerie, whom the young naval officer had so heartlessly deserted for another.

Then people said Valerie would become the wife of Frank Fairfield, the young master of Cedar Hall.

It was true that a duel had been fought on her account, and Frank Fairfield had been wounded nigh unto death; but, with his rival married and disowned, the field was once more open to him, and until the coming of Dunbar Kennon to Cloudlands the maiden had appeared to have loved Cedar Hall's master.

So the eyes of the community were upon Valerie and Frank Fairfield.

Between these two a strange compact had been entered into: Valerie Rossmore had promised that, should Dunbar Kennon die, *not by the hand of Frank Fairfield*, she would become his wife.

And Frank Fairfield had schemed and plotted that Dunbar Kennon should die. He dared not challenge him to another duel, for if he should kill him, the compact would be broken; but he expected that Valerie would marry him, should Zulita, Kennon's young wife be gotten rid of, and so he determined that the death of both must occur, for, to marry Valerie and become master of Cloudlands Frank Fairfield had now determined.

To rid himself of Dunbar Kennon as a rival, before he knew of his marriage with Zulita, Fairfield had bribed his swordmaster, Monsieur Pierre Gerard to aid him, in fact to take the whole affair in his hands.

Cruel, an adventurer, with gold his God, Pierre Gerard had gone out on his baleful mission, hunted Dunbar Kennon down, and in the disguise of a Mexican, as Don Leon Lafonte, had picked a quarrel with him, a duel had followed and the young American officer had twice spared the life of the Frenchman.

After that it was that young Kennon returned to Cloudlands with Zulita, and having been, as we have seen, disinherited, had become master of the ill-omened pirate craft which he had changed into a packet vessel and named the Rover Queen.

But, once more upon his track was put the relentless Frenchman by his unprincipled master; Dunbar Kennon must be disposed of to leave the field clear for Frank Fairfield to win both a rich bride and Cloudlands.

So matters stood when the Rover Queen set sail, deserted by her old crew, and manned by a new one, this being a part of a plot that will be developed in good time.

But at River Vale farm dwelt one who was also watching the way in which affairs were shaping themselves; that one was Di Douglass, the beautiful young girl who had saved the life of Frank Fairfield, entered into a secret marriage with him, and then, upon the coming of Valerie Rossmore to Cloudlands had been deserted by the man whom she had so dearly loved and clandestinely married.

True, she had been told that her secret marriage was but a mockery, having been performed by a hireling in the pay of Fairfield.

In her despair she had threatened exposure and vengeance, but loving the man who had so basely deceived her, she had yielded to his entreaty to give him time in which to make all come out as she would wish it.

Thus, while the Rover Queen sailed under her gallant young captain, accompanied by his beautiful bride, and with Pierre Gerard on board to plot their destruction. Valerie Rossmore dwelt at Cloudlands, and Frank Fairfield, anxious, hoping, dreading, lived like an exile at Cedar Hall, awaiting news from his hireling that the disowned son was dead, and that, therefore, the barrier to the heiress of Cloudlands was swept away.

But Di Douglass was still in his path, watchful, suspicious, determined; and so one day she started off, to visit kindred in the city, it was said; but that was a mere pretense, for step by step she had traced out the plot of Frank Fairfield to deceive her; the one who performed the ceremony had been found, and was not, as he had stated, a *hireling* and not a clergyman, for one day she had entered the vestry-room of a little country church, in an adjoining State, and found there one whose face she had not forgotten.

He rose at her coming and seemed to recall her face, for he said:

"We have met before, miss, have we not?"

"Yes, sir."

"And can I serve you in any way?"

"You can, sir."

And Di Douglass tried hard to be calm.

"You are the Reverend Jonathan Dale?"

"I am."

"You had a charge in New York, a chapel in a village upon the Hudson River?"

"Yes, a year ago."

"Why did you come here?"

"I was offered this charge; it was a larger church, a better field for me, and my remuneration was greater, so I took it, as I was the better able to care for an aged mother."

"Do you know through whose influence you were called here, sir?"

"I do not; but I believe through friends in New York who knew me."

And the young clergyman seemed surprised at the questions of his fair visitor.

"Do you recall being one night in the vestry-room of the little chapel on the Hudson when a couple came and asked you to marry them?"

"I do."

"Do you know them?"

"I do not."

"Can you recall the circumstance to me, please, Mr. Dale?"

"It was Saturday night, and I was seated at my desk, revising my sermon, when a knock came at the door, and, in answer to my call, two persons entered, one a young man in sailor garb, the other a maiden plainly dressed.

"I was surprised, for the chapel was situated in a lonely spot surrounded by a graveyard and the nearest house a quarter of a mile away, a farm-house where I boarded.

"I complied with their request to be married, the sexton, who had taken advantage of my being there to brush up the chapel, acting as witness to the ceremony."

"And this marriage was legal?"

"By all means, miss."

"And the sexton?"

"Strange to say he moved away some months ago, having had a farm left him, I believe, by some distant relative, and on his way stopped to see me."

"You know his address, sir?"

"Yes, miss; I have it here in this book."

And he read off:

"ABRAM SYKES,
"Easton,
"Pennsylvania."

Di Douglass took down the name and address and asked:

"You say that he is a farmer, Mr. Dale?"

"Yes, miss; living near Easton, he told me."

"Was this marriage entered in the church register?"

"Certainly, for I recall it now as a coincidence, that it was on the last page of the old register, and the leaf becoming soiled, I copied it off with several other entries in a new register before leaving."

"Thank God!" broke from the lips of Di Douglass, and then she said, eagerly:

"Mr. Dale, I am the girl who was that night married in the little chapel, and I wish to tell you now that the ceremony was said to have been illegal, while the last page of that old register has been torn out and destroyed.

"But you say the marriage is in the new one, and your words give me joy untold.

"I beg of you to keep my secret; but your place here was gotten for you to remove you from the old chapel where you could appear as a witness in my favor, the leaf from the church register was destroyed, and Abram Sykes, the sexton, was given a farm near Easton to get him out of the way."

"Keep my secret, I beg of you; but let me feel that I can call upon you to prove all if I need you."

"You can, I assure you, miss," replied the young clergyman, now deeply interested in the beautiful girl who was trying so hard to prove that she was a true wife.

And from the little town, where was located the church of the Reverend Jonathan Dale, Di Douglass proceeded to Easton, Pennsylvania, by stage, and the farm of Abram Sykes was found, and another witness to the falsehood of Frank Fairfield was obtained in the ex-sexton of the little chapel on the banks of the Hudson.

All he knew about his inheritance was that a lawyer had written him that one of his name had died and left him the snug little farm near Easton, and thither he had moved with his family too happy in his possessing a home without cost to ask questions.

And Di Douglass did not tell him that it was Frank Fairfield's work, but started upon her return home armed with proof of the perfidy of the man to whom she had given her heart's devotion.

But upon her arrival at River Vale Farm a bitter blow was dealt her, for, hoping that the proof that she held would force the husband to acknowledge her as his wife, she learned that he had, some days before, been wedded to Valerie Rossmore, for news that could not be doubted having come of the loss of the Rover Queen, with all on board, the heiress of Cloudlands had kept her compact and become, as she believed, the wife of Farmer Frank Fairfield.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FATE OF THE ROVER QUEEN.

The brig Rover Queen was, as has been said, a beautiful vessel. Fleet and sea-worthy, she had long been, as the Vampire, a terror on the seas, under the command of a pirate captain, and well was it said that her decks had been stained with blood, and her cabin had been filled with the moans of innocent victims to the hate of Brule, the Buccaneer.

But, one day, the Vampire had been surprised close inshore by an American cruiser, and Dunbar Kennon had attacked and captured her with the boats from the vessel-of-war.

Brule had been either killed, or in some mys-

terious way had managed to escape to the shore, and the career of the Vampire was over.

And yet, the crew who had sailed in her, when metamorphosed into a packet vessel, had not left her because she had once been the pirate craft Vampire. They had made a number of voyages in her, admired her speed and seaworthiness, and were delighted with their young captain; but gold had tempted them to desert the young captain at the moment of sailing, and the same potent agency had caused new men to be on hand to ship, and sail in the brig.

Mate Matson had done his work well, bribed by Monsieur Pierre Gerard, and with the crew, had received his pay.

But, remorse came to him as he saw the pretty craft speed away down New York Harbor and realized that her gallant captain and his beautiful bride were at the mercy of a set of human fiends, led on by Pierre Gerard.

And well had the wily Frenchman laid his plans of deviltry, for the crew that had been shipped were all in his pay.

When Dunbar Kennon had fought a duel with the Frenchman, who pretended to be Don Leon Lafonte, a Mexican, Paul had recognized the cheat, and afterward had told his master who his enemy was.

Keeping his own counsel, Dunbar Kennon had not betrayed this knowledge, when the Frenchman, once more wearing his beard and appearing as his real self, had sought passage upon the Rover Queen to New Orleans, and the eyes of himself and Paul were upon him.

But he could not believe that the Frenchman was at the bottom of his crew's desertion, and was secretly the leader of the new men, so that he was wholly at the mercy of his artful enemy.

With but one mate and Paul true to him, Dunbar Kennon had accepted the offer of Pierre Gerard to act as second mate, and thus had the Rover Queen set sail with her strange and untried crew.

It was the second night out, and Dunbar Kennon held the deck. It was bright moonlight, and the Rover Queen, under pressure of full sail, was fairly flying along, driven by a ten-knot breeze.

The crew had proven themselves thorough seamen, and the Frenchman had shown that he was a very fair mate, while he had been most polite to both Dunbar Kennon and his lovely wife.

"Master, can I speak with you, sir?" said Paul, coming aft to where Dunbar Kennon stood, and he spoke in a whisper, that the man at the wheel should not hear him.

"Go into the cabin, Paul, and I will soon come there," was the low reply, and Paul obeyed.

"Monsieur Gerard, will you hold the deck, while I write up my log?" asked Dunbar Kennon, entering the cabin, where the Frenchman sat, talking to Zulita.

Pierre Gerard acquiesced pleasantly and went on deck, and going back to the state-room where the negro awaited him, Dunbar Kennon said:

"Well, Paul, what is it?"

"Master, I have been on the watch, sir, and I am sure that the Frenchman and the crew understand each other."

"I don't think so, Paul."

"Still, master, it is so, for I overheard him tell the bo'sen that nothing would be done until they had gotten into the Gulf, and then they would act."

"You heard this, Paul?"

"Yes, master."

"Then something is going on between them, and you must keep your eyes and ears open, and I will do the same, and put Mate Melville on his guard, too."

"No, master, for though I don't think he is, he may also be in with them. I'll get the weapons ready, sir, and we'll wear them all the time, but not let them know it, and Missy Zulita can do the same."

"I think it a good idea; but now return to the deck, while I write up the log, so as not to have them suspect that we hold suspicion against them."

So saying, Captain Kennon wrote up the log, then went back to his post on deck, and from that day both he and Paul were upon their guard.

The mate, Melville, who had remained true to the ship, appeared to be honest, and yet Kennon dared not trust him.

Thus the days went by, the Rover Queen sailing swiftly on her way and at last was running through the Bahamas and into the blue waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

"To-night, sir, if at any time," whispered Paul, addressing Captain Kennon, as he stood on deck with Zulita.

"All right, Paul," was the answer, and turning to Zulita, he continued:

"Zulita, you had better go into the cabin now; but, as I have warned you of dreaded danger, be ready to protect yourself."

"I will, Dunbar," was the quiet response.

"And, Zulita, keep Mate Melville in the cabin with you; but have ready weapons to give him, should he prove not to be a traitor, for, if an at-

tack is made, and he comes to the aid of Paul and myself, he may turn the tide in our favor."

"And the Frenchman?"

"Is forward, I think, hatching out the plot which Paul vows he is at the bottom of."

Zulita made no reply, but descended into the cabin, while Dunbar loosened his pistols in his belt and got ready to meet a foe, if one came.

Paul stood not far away, leaning over the bulwark, glancing out upon the sea, as the brig sped swiftly along.

Suddenly one of the crew came amidships, then another and another, until all were grouped together, yet apparently with no hostile intent.

Pierre Gerard, sinister-faced and resolute, had entered the cabin, but now came on deck, and, walking toward Captain Kennon, suddenly threw his pistol forward and drew trigger.

But, quick as he was, Dunbar was quicker, and a bullet from his pistol knocked the weapon of the Frenchman from his hand.

"Rush on him, lads!" cried Gerard, and, as his words were uttered, Paul opened fire, while Dunbar Kennon did the same.

Wounded as he was in the hand, Gerard rushed toward the treacherous crew to lead them in a mass upon the daring young skipper.

But the fact that both Captain Kennon and Paul were armed caused dismay among the crew, and several of them fell dead in their tracks just as Zulita sprung out on deck accompanied by Mate Melville and both of them with weapons in their hands, for the officer had proved himself true to his commander.

Taken by surprise, the mutineers under Gerard retreated forward, while the brig, with the helmsman shot down by Kennon, lay to rolling upon the waters.

"Here, men!" called out Gerard, "take to this life-boat, for all the others are broken up. The brig has been scuttled and will soon go down."

A cheer broke from the crew as they put the life-boat over the side forward, only anxious to get away from the hot fire now opened upon them by Captain Kennon, Paul and the mate.

Some of them returned the fire, while the life-boat, already provisioned secretly, was launched into the sea.

Still under fire of the four they had doomed to death in the brig the mutineers sprung into the life-boat leaving their dead mates upon the decks, while Pierre Gerard called out:

"Captain Kennon, you and your beautiful wife, and those with you, are doomed, for the brig will not float an hour. I was paid to destroy you, and my work is done!"

Down below darted Paul, and in a moment he returned, while he cried:

"It is true, master; the brig is sinking fast, and we are lost!"

As Paul uttered the words, Mate Melville, who had received a wound, though he had not spoken of it, reeled and fell dead upon the deck at the feet of Zulita.

CHAPTER IX.

MUTINEERS IN PERIL.

MONSIEUR PIERRE GERARD had well planned his diabolical attempt to kill Captain Dunbar Kennon, and thus get him out of the way of Frank Fairfield.

The life-boat was at once pulled away from the sinking ship, and those on board seemed doomed, for not a boat was available, all had been rendered useless, and the mate lay dead at their feet, leaving the young captain, Zulita and the ever-faithful Paul to face their dread fate together.

Just as the boat pulled off, with the mutineers, a severe squall struck the brig, and with the sails set as they were, threw her over on her beam-ends.

The squall had been wholly unexpected, and at once the spray and mist shut the mutineer boat out of sight of the brig, and Pierre Gerard and those on board had to look to their own safety.

"She has gone, and my work is done," said the Frenchman, in a tone of exultation, as the brig disappeared from sight, and all saw her go over on her side the moment before she did so.

For a few moments the life-boat was driven furiously along before the squall, and the waves rose higher and higher, until all began to feel that they were to be thwarted in their intention to make a landing at Key West.

Out into the Gulf they were driven, and when at last the gale blew over they knew that it would be no easy matter to reach a port within the next twenty-four hours.

When the mutineers had begun their red work, they had been but a few leagues from the Florida Coast; but now, in the darkness, and driven far by the gale they knew not where they were, and, instead of an easy pull ashore, as they had anticipated and planned, they now discovered that their lives were in danger, for the boat was provisioned but for a day.

Still, the life-boat was stanch, and they hoped that with the morning they would find matters not so bad as they feared, and, if far from

land, would be picked up by some passing vessel, when their story would be told of how the Rover Queen had been lost, and the captain, his wife, negro cook and several of the men had taken to the other life-boat, which they feared had been swamped.

But, with the morning no land was in sight, the sea was upon all sides with not a sail to meet their vision.

All day they strained their eyes in searching for a sail, and drifted about in a helpless way, for there was not a breath of air so that they could use their canvas, and, to their dismay they found that out of the four oars they had put into the boat two had been lost overboard and a third broken.

As their provisions grew scarce, and the dead calm continued, the hungry men began to lay their situation to the conduct of Pierre Gerard, telling him boldly that he had planned the affair badly, and that they should have stuck to the brig and turned her into a pirate craft.

Angry glances were cast at him, and some hinted that the next day they would get rid of him, as they believed him to be a Jonah.

When the dawn broke the Frenchman was awake, while the others slept.

He was fearful that his end was near, and he eagerly looked through the gray of dawn hoping for the glimpse of a sail.

But none was in sight and yet, as the day brightened a breeze sprung up and the men, under its cheerful influence forgot their threats against the Frenchman.

"Sail ho!"

Pierre Gerard almost shrieked the words, as his eyes fell upon a distant spot upon the horizon.

It certainly was a sail, and it did not take very long to show that it was coming on a course that must bring them near to it.

On, on came the vessel, until it was seen to be a schooner.

"From her build she's an American cruiser, or a pirate, and she's armed," said one of the mutineers, who was a weather-beaten old sailor who seemed competent from past experience to judge, for he looked the pirate throughout.

Nearer and nearer came the schooner, until at last the old sailor said:

"Lads, I know that craft, though I hasn't seen her but once; but that was two months ago, and I'll tell you it's the buccaneer schooner whose cap'n is called the Sea Spider."

"I guesses we will have to walk the plank, for he hasn't a man to show mercy."

CHAPTER X.

THE SEA SPIDER.

The words of the old seaman caused a feeling of consternation in the hearts of his fellow-mutineers and the dark face of Pierre Gerard turned to an ashen hue.

"Had ne plotted for gold only to lose his life at the hands of a pirate!"

Such were his thoughts, and then suddenly his face brightened, for it came to his mind that if the schooner was the buccaneer vessel, Sea Spider, that it would be best for them not to play honest tars, but to come out boldly and say just what they had done, thus winning favor in the eyes of the pirates.

As mutineers, men who had plotted the destruction of the brig and death of the noble commander, they certainly would feel at home on a pirate deck, and the chief would doubtless be glad to have them join his crew.

So Pierre Gerard argued, and they all seemed to feel that he was right.

"I have seen notices in the paper of late about an outlaw craft called the Sea Spider, so tell us all about her, mate," said Pierre Gerard, addressing the old sailor who had recognized the craft.

"Well, she chased us on our way to Boston some six weeks ago, for I was on a packet-schooner, and but for the darkness and a storm she would have caught us, for though our craft sailed like a witch, yonder vessel overhauled her two to one."

"Who is her captain?" asked one of the men.

"They say he is King of the Pirate League known as the Island Rovers, but that I don't know for sure."

"Certain it is, though, he has got a good craft and a crew that will fight a line-o'-battle ship if he says so, and his schooner has been playing havoc in the Gulf the six months past."

"And they call her the Sea Spider?" asked Pierre Gerard.

"Yes, and her cap'n, too, and they do say as has seen her close, that she carries a black flag with a huge red spider in the center of it; but I guess we'll soon see for ourselves, as on the tack she's now taking she'll head us off."

All eyes were now upon the coming schooner, which was indeed a beautiful craft.

As she drew nearer it was seen that her hull was very long and sharp, the stern being extremely narrow, and, like the bows, rising high.

Her bulwarks were bright, but with a graceful curve amidships fore and aft, and her masts were remarkably tall, which, with the wide

space between them, and enormous mainboom and far-projecting bowsprit gave her an immense spread of sail.

She stood up well under the stiff breeze then blowing and cut through the water without a ripple, while her wake was a clean one.

Her hull was jet-black, relieved by a red belt edged with gold, and her whole appearance was that of a wicked-looking craft.

It could be seen that she had a good battery, and her decks swarmed with men, their red caps giving them an ominous look as they peered over the bulwarks at the boat of the mutineers.

As she drew nearer the old sailor said:

"That's the Sea Spider, for look at her figure-head, mates."

All looked, and they saw that the old mutineer was right, for under the bowsprit in a black netting that resembled a web, was a huge red spider.

Pierre Gerard inwardly groaned.

He had hoped that the schooner would prove to be an American trader, and that his story of the loss of the Rover Queen would be believed, while he would be landed in some port, go North to get his golden reward from Frank Fairfield and all would be well with him, lacking certain compunctions of conscience, if he had any conscience.

In ten minutes more there came from the deck of the schooner a ringing hail:

"Boat ahoy!"

"Ay, ay, sir," called out Pierre Gerard.

"I will lay to, so come alongside!"

"Ay, ay, sir."

The hail was in English, for the life-boat had raised the American flag astern, but the one who hailed had an accent that sounded Spanish.

Just as the life-boat drew near, up to the mizzen peak fluttered a black flag, in the center of which was a red spider, while in the four corners was an eye of gold.

As the mutineers stepped on board a stern voice ordered:

"Cast the boat adrift, and bring those men here."

Pierre Gerard walked aft, followed by his fellow-mutineers, all of them wishing that he should be the spokesman.

If the craft had appeared beautiful from a view out upon the sea, she certainly was far more so from her decks.

Her whole appearance indicated perfect discipline, every rope being in place, her decks clean and white and her battery of nine guns, three of which were large pivots, was certainly most formidable.

Her crew were dressed in white pants, blue shirts and wore red skull-caps, and were a dark-faced, bold-looking set, all of them appearing strangely youthful, for there were none who looked over thirty years of age.

They were some four-score in number, and looked like men to man the formidable battery of the craft, set sail, or strip her of canvas in an instant, to handle the small-arms ranged along the bulwarks, as their chief commanded them.

Aft stood the leader of this daring crew, and in his tall, splendid form and dark face the reader will recognize Mazula the King of the Island Rovers.

Mazula was dressed in a black uniform, as though ominous of his calling being one of death, and it was gorgeously trimmed with silver lace.

In the center of his black hat was embroidered an eye of gold, and upon either shoulder was a pair of white wings, serving as shoulder-straps, while in the center of his breast was a red spider, thus bringing in all the emblems of the Island Rovers.

"Well, señor, who and what are you?" he asked sternly, fixing his black, penetrating eyes upon Pierre Gerard and his fellow-mutineers, as they went aft and confronted the Sea Spider.

CHAPTER XI.

DOUBLY A TRAITOR.

IN answer to the question of Mazula, Monsieur Pierre Gerard responded, after an instant of hesitation, and speaking in Spanish, which he hoped would aid him with the outlaw chief:

"Señor Captain, we are from the American brig Rover Queen, which foundered at sea two nights ago."

The Frenchman saw the Island Rover King start at his words and could not account for it, and he grew a trifle nervous, and showed it.

"From the Rover Queen, you say?" asked Mazula quickly.

"Yes, señor," and Pierre Gerard was sorry that he had not given another name.

"A brig?"

"Yes, señor."

"Running between New Orleans and New York, in the States?"

"Yes, señor."

"Her commander's name?"

"Dunbar Kennon, señor."

"You are right; but where is he?"

"At the bottom of the Gulf, señor."

"No!" and the face of Mazula became livid and Pierre Gerard felt most uncomfortable,

while his fellow-mutineers, unable to understand what was being said, as the conversation was in Spanish, were also most uneasy.

"Yes, Señor Captain, the Rover Queen sprung a leak and we had to leave her."

"As we took to our boat, and before the other life-boat, containing the captain, his wife and our mates who were to go with him, the brig was struck by a squall, was thrown over on her beam-ends and then went down."

"Curses upon you, man! do you tell me the truth?" cried Mazula in a voice of thunder.

"Yes, señor, but we were unable to save them, I assure you."

To and fro, evidently deeply moved, paced Mazula, until suddenly he halted before the Frenchman and asked:

"You are sure that all except those in your boat were drowned?"

"Yes, señor."

"The captain?"

"Yes, señor?"

"And his wife, you say?"

"Yes, señor."

"Had he a negro with him?"

"He had, Señor Captain."

"He was drowned also?"

"It could not be otherwise."

"You saw the brig go down?"

"We saw her go over upon her beam-ends, señor, and the storm break upon her."

"Then she is lost."

"Without doubt, señor."

"Describe the captain's wife?"

"A dark-faced, most beautiful woman, a Mexican señora I have heard, with eyes like the moon in their softness and a form as graceful as a willow swayed by the wind."

"She was lovely beyond compare, Señor Captain."

"You have described her, señor; but do you know what was her name?"

"Zulita, the captain called her."

"There can be no mistake now; but, curses upon them! they have escaped my vengeance, and I lose my revenge," and the eyes of the Island Rover King fairly blazed with hatred.

His words let Pierre Gerard into a secret, however, and he breathed more freely while he said:

"But, señor, in their death you are avenged."

Mazula turned upon him and said:

"Who are you?"

"Monsieur Pierre Gerard, señor, a poor French swordmaster."

"Ah! you were not an officer, then, of the Rover Queen?"

"No, señor, and yet I was, for the craft having been a pirate vessel, the Vampire, was looked upon as ill-omened, and her crew deserted her just at the hour of sailing."

"These men volunteered to ship for double pay, and I, as a passenger, acted as mate for Captain Kennon."

"I was searching for that vessel, señor, for I had a revenge to gain upon Señor Kennon, his beautiful bride and the negro."

"For months I have been on the watch for her, having discovered who was her commander, and now you tell me that she has gone to the bottom and those I sought to capture and put to death by the vilest torture I could desire have gone down with her."

"You have dealt me a bitter blow, señor, in the news you give me."

"I am sorry, señor," and Pierre Gerard remained silent while his brain was busy.

The pirate chief frankly had admitted that he was seeking the Rover Queen to avenge himself upon Dunbar Kennon and Zulita.

Had Kennon run off with the pirate's lady-love? wondered the Frenchman.

With the confession of the Island Rover, he thought that he could tell more of the truth and perhaps thus curry favor with the chief.

So he said, cautiously:

"Señor Captain, I had a motive in going on board of the Rover Queen, similar to what yours was in hunting for the vessel."

"Ah! explain, señor."

"My motive was also revenge."

"Against whom?"

"The Señor Kennon."

"Ha! you have cause to remember him, too?"

"Señor, let me tell you just why I remember him as I do."

"Do so, and quickly."

"I told you I was a swordmaster?"

"Yes."

"Well, señor, I was engaged by a gentleman, a young man of wealth in the States, dwelling not far from New York, to teach him the perfect use of a blade."

"He, my pupil, dearly loved a fair maiden dwelling near him, and was hopeful of winning her when Captain Dunbar Kennon, then an officer in the United States Navy, visited his home."

"Yes, I know the place well," was the surprising remark of Mazula.

The lady in question was the ward of Captain Kennon's father, and the young officer met her upon his return home and they became engaged.

"My pupil was angered at this, challenged his

rival, they fought, and Captain Kennon went to sea, believing that he had killed his adversary."

"But my pupil recovered, and more revengeful toward him than ever, sent me to fight Captain Kennon."

"I picked a quarrel with him and he disarmed me, giving me my life."

"Then it was that I discovered that Captain Kennon was returning home, accompanied by his wife and the negro, Paul."

"He reached home to find his father dying; but the old gentleman having disowned and disinherited him for not marrying his ward, to whom he was engaged, and Captain Kennon, made thus a poor man, was forced to go to sea again."

"Having resigned his berth in the navy, he took command of the Queen Rover."

"But, although married, the lady in question would not give him up, it seems, though she promised to marry my pupil if Captain Kennon was dead."

"Señor, I went on board the Rover Queen to see that Captain Kennon never reached port!"

"Aha! I see," said Mazula.

"When I return and report that he is dead, the lady who got his inheritance will marry my pupil, señor, and I will get my reward for valuable services rendered."

"Your being a Sea Rover, señor, I make my confession to you frankly; but I would advise that you trust not one of these men here, for they will do anything to save their lives," and Pierre Gerard smiled as he glanced at his brother-mutineers, toward whom he was proving himself doubly a traitor, and upon whom he sought revenge for their conduct toward him in threatening to kill him.

CHAPTER XII.

THE ALLY OF A PIRATE

THE mutineers had strained their ears, and busied their brains, in an endeavor to hear what Pierre Gerard was saying to the King of the Island Rovers; but, though one or two of their number understood a word or two of Spanish they could not catch the meaning of the conversation.

The Sea Spider schooner was again upon her course, while far astern was visible adrift the white life-boat of the mutineers.

The seven seamen who had shipped on board the Rover Queen, bribed to do the work cut out for them by the Frenchman, stood grouped together to windward, while a few paces in their front was Pierre Gerard, confronting Mazula.

At the wheel, some steps away, stood a man, too busy in watching his vessel to pay attention to what the Frenchman was telling his captain, and a couple of young officers lounged to leeward, knowing their chief too well to listen unbidden.

So it was that Mazula and Pierre Gerard alone knew all that was said by each other.

When the latter turned to his mates and smiled, they saw not the sinister look beneath and took it as a sign of good omen, and their faces wore a smile too.

"Well, señor, I am glad indeed that I picked you up, and yet your story distresses me, for if it be true I lose my revenge."

"It is true, señor."

"I do not doubt your word, señor, only I hope that the Señor Kennon and his lovely bride have not been lost."

"I think there can be no doubt as to that, Señor Captain."

"I hope that there is, for I came out in this vessel to find Captain Kennon and the fair Zulita. To be frank with you, I do not mind telling you that I sought them in the States, went to the home of the American and tracked him to New York, when I learned that he had taken command of the merchant packet brig Rover Queen."

"In his different voyages he was able, in some way, to elude me; but I meant to keep in his track until I captured him."

"And you say that his wife is believed to be a Mexican lady?"

"Yes, señor."

"You are mistaken, señor."

"Indeed, Señor Captain?"

"Yes, and I will tell you who she is, for I do not mind telling a man who is wholly in my power a state secret," and Mazula smiled.

But Pierre Gerard did not like the smile, as it was full of an appalling significance, and it found no reflex upon his face, as had his smile upon the faces of his shipmates.

"You have heard of a strange people who roam from island to island in different seas, and are suspected of being buccaneers?"

"I have heard of a people called Island Rovers, if they are the same, Señor Captain."

"They are."

"And they are buccaneers, you say, señor?"

"I did not say that they were, but that they were said to be."

"I have heard the same, señor."

"Yes, but they appear an honest people, trading with their small vessels, only they live apart from the rest of the world."

"These people have a well-organized Government of their own, and the descendants of their

founder, one who was said to be a noted pirate chief, have ruled them until of late."

"Their latest ruler was a young girl, beautiful and good, and she was known as Queen Zulita."

"But she fell in love with a prisoner, an American officer under sentence of death, but just why I need not say, and she aided him to escape and fled with him."

"Ah! it was Captain Kennon."

"You have said it."

"And his wife was a pirate queen?"

"I did not say so; but I remarked that she was Queen Zulita of the Island Rovers."

"Ah yes, señor."

"And she fled with this young American officer."

"I understand, señor."

"I am an Island Rover."

"You, señor?"

"Yes, and I was to have married the Queen Zulita, having been honored by our Wise Men by being selected to become her husband."

"She was very beautiful, Señor Captain."

"She was, and I loved her very dearly, so you see I feel revengeful for her running off with the American."

"Then, too, our laws are as grim as death, and she has placed herself under a ban in doing what she did, and hence my duty was to hunt her down, for until she is dead I can take unto myself no queen."

"And you are the King of the Island Rovers, señor?" said Pierre Gerard, gazing with deep interest upon the handsome but cruel-faced young buccaneer.

"I am, and this vessel is the flagship of my squadron."

"Men call you also the Sea Spider?"

"Yes, and I rather like the name, as you see I have adopted the flag, and my web is never empty, for I spread it over the seas with my fleet cruisers."

"We are a race of Sea Spiders, señor: but you did not tell me your name?"

"Pierre Gerard, Señor King."

"You speak Spanish like a Spaniard."

"I am French, señor; but call me Don Leon Lafonte, if you prefer the name."

"No, I like your French name; but now as to your fate."

"My fate, señor?"

"Yes, for I have not yet decided what to do with you."

"Oh, señor."

"Perhaps I will make you my ally, and we will go and cruise in search of the Rover Queen."

"I fear it will be useless, señor."

"We can at least find out, for I have ample time upon my hands now, so you can direct my helmsman to steer directly to the locality where you lost the brig, then give me the direction from whence the gale came and we will see what we can find out."

"Yes, señor."

"But now to these men?"

"What about them, Señor Captain?"

"Well, do you think I had better let them take the Death Oath and join our League, ordering them to duty among the crew, or shall I have them put to death?"

"The latter, señor, for you cannot trust them," was the malignant response of the Frenchman.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MUTINEERS' DOOM.

THE crew of mutineers were hopeful, for they saw that the Rover chief was showing no anger toward the Frenchman, and his manner seemed cordial even.

Rumors had been going about from shore to shore and sea to sea for years, regarding the Island Rovers, and yet it had never been proven that any of their vessels had actually been captured, or found in a real act of piracy.

In truth, none of the fleet little cruisers had ever been taken, as it was said they would sink their vessel with all on board rather than surrender, when attacked by a vessel-of-war.

Often of late there had been much talk about the fleet craft known as the Sea Spider, under command of Mazula, but no one had seemed to connect the craft definitely with the Island Rovers.

Now that they were on the deck of the Sea Spider the mutineers remembered that the Sea Spider himself was said to show no mercy; but, the manner in which he had held conversation with Pierre Gerard gave them hope that all would be well.

So they were somewhat startled when Pierre Gerard turned and said:

"Mates, there is no hope."

"What is to be done with us?" asked the old sailor, assuming the position of spokesman for his mates.

Pierre Gerard turned to Mazula before answering, and he having heard the question, and understanding English perfectly, replied quietly:

"You are to die."

"Mercy, señor," came in a chorus from the seven.

The Rival Monte Cristos.

"You might as well ask it of a stone."

"But we will join your crew and serve you well, Señor Captain," pleaded the old seaman, and there came in a deep, earnest chorus:

"Ay, ay, sir, we will."

"I do not need your services, so prepare to walk the plank, and you take the Death Leap in irons."

"Señor Balbo!"

"Ay, ay, my King," and one of the young officers of the schooner stepped forward quickly and saluted.

"Put these men in treble irons, draw the black masks over their faces and lead them over the plank to take the Death Leap in just fifteen minutes from now."

"Ay, ay, my King," and the Señor Balbo laid hands upon Pierre Gerard, who shrank back with a cry of horror.

Mazula laughed at his alarm, and said:

"Leave that, Señor Balbo, and take the others."

A perfect howl of rage went up from the mutineers, and the old seaman cried fiercely:

"Are we to suffer and not that man?"

"Yes, for I need this man, and I do not need you. Lead them off, Balbo."

"Yes, my King!"

The mutineers looked as though they would have resisted, but a call from the young officer brought a score of Rovers at a run.

Then, with one accord the betrayed men sprung upon Pierre Gerard. The attack was so sudden that he was in their grasp and borne to the deck in an instant.

But the Rovers were upon the maddened mutineers and they were dragged off of the Frenchman, though not until he had received some severe blows and a choking that nearly deprived him of his life.

Mazula laughed, when he saw that Pierre Gerard was not seriously hurt, and said:

"A narrow escape, Señor Gerard; but, it would have been your death at their hands very quickly, had I not set my pack of sea-dogs upon them."

Pierre Gerard's face was scratched, black from choking and bleeding freely; but he felt that he was safe.

Strong as he was, and active as a cat, he had been but a child in the hands of his maddened comrades.

"Now, Balbo, let them be gotten ready for the leap at once, for I am anxious to have this matter over with," and Mazula turned to the young officer, who quickly had his men drag the mutineers forward to be put in irons.

"Señor Gerard, you had better go into the cabin and make yourself presentable for the double ceremony."

"Double ceremony, Señor Captain?"

"Yes."

Pierre Gerard looked alarmed. He was not yet perfectly sure of his own safety.

"The men yonder are to take the Death Leap into the sea."

"Yes, señor."

"You are to take the Death Oath, señor."

"Ah, Señor Captain."

"One who joins our League of Island Rovers is admitted into the fellowship upon binding himself by an oath, and one which few men have the courage to break. Should they do so then there are secret men in our League to hunt them off the face of the earth."

"Yes, señor," and Pierre Gerard shuddered.

Queen Zulita broke her oath, for all of us are bound by it, be we native Island Rovers or not, and she is to be hunted down, along with Lazuli, the maid who fled with her.

Then there was a young captain of our cruiser craft, the Spray, Harman, and his crew of four men, who aided the escape of Queen Zulita and the American officer.

"They are to be also hunted down and brought back to suffer the penalty."

"They, the five on the Spray, are not native Rovers, but joined the League by taking the Death Oath, as you will have to do; but their punishment is just as fearful."

"Now, Señor Gerard, make yourself presentable to witness the Death Leap of your comrades, and also to take the Death Oath," and Mazula spoke in a manner that caused the cold chills to creep down the back of the listener.

Going into the cabin, Pierre Gerard soon made himself presentable, as far as his bruised face would permit, and returning on deck behold a strange scene.

His seven comrades had been put in chains. Iron collars were about their necks, and a belt of the same metal encircled their waists, while manacles were upon their wrists and ankles.

To each of these bands heavy chains were hung, presenting an appearance that was fearful to look upon.

A board had been placed over the bulwark to leeward, extending some ten feet out over the waters, and with a weight attached, and the other end had been secured inboard, but in such a manner that a spring which held it, upon being sprung, would cause the inner end, upon

which stood a victim, to fly into the air, hurling the man thirty feet into the sea.

It was a horrible contrivance of fiendish ingenuity in getting rid of one under death sentence, and it was what the Island Rovers called the Death Leap.

The doomed men were standing in a row, silent, weighted down with irons and trembling, as Pierre Gerard came on deck.

The plank was all ready, the heavy weight at the outside end swinging with the motion of the vessel, which was gliding swiftly along, well heeled over. The victim at the head of the line of doomed men was standing where he could step upon the fatal end, beneath which was the spring, a touch upon it being sufficient to cause it to fly up and send the human being flying into the air.

"Ah, Señor Gerard, we await you," said Mazula with a smile, and he turned to the young officer Balbo and continued:

"All ready, Balbo."

"Ay, ay, my King," and as he spoke he took hold of the leading victim, who happened to be the old seaman, and forced him to step upon the spring end of the fatal plank.

The mutineer stood there a moment trembling violently, and then at the command of the Sea Spider the spring was touched and victim number one was hurled into the air, his clanking chains mingling with the wild shriek that broke from his lips at his awful doom.

The comrades of the leader echoed his cry of despair; but they were given no time for fear, as one by one they were forced upon the fatal plank, as soon as the trap was again set, and each was sent flying to his death in the sea, to be dragged to its furthest depths by the irons upon him.

When the last had made the Death Leap, the Sea Spider turned to Pierre Gerard and said with unmoved face:

"Señor, your comrades are well out of your way now, so it is for you to take the Death Oath, which will make you a good Island Rover— Ha! is he dead from fright?" and the Sea Spider started, for Pierre Gerard had fallen heavily to the deck.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DEATH OATH.

PIERRE GERARD was not dead. He had simply fainted, being overcome with emotion at the terrible sight which he had been forced to witness.

He had felt that a word from him would have allowed his comrades to take the Death Oath and live.

But he was revengeful.

He remembered how near they had been to killing him in the life-boat, and so he wished to get his revenge upon them.

Then, too, he was looking to the future.

With them out of the way there would be no witnesses against him as to the fate of the Rover Queen.

So he had wished them to die, and yet the manner of their taking off had unnerved him.

He saw how merciless was Mazula, the Sea Spider, and it awed him.

He was upon the point of crying for mercy for the remaining victims when he felt himself growing dizzy, and he fell in a swoon upon the deck.

Mazula bent over him and said:

"He has fainted."

"His nerves gave way under the pressure and what he has passed through; but he'll come round in a few moments."

"Throw some water in his face, Duke."

The one he addressed was his second officer, a young, daring-looking fellow with a free-and-easy air that was quite attractive.

In obedience he called for a bucket, caught up some sea-water and dashed it into the face of the prostrate man.

A second ducking, with no light hand, caused Pierre Gerard to strike out with his arms and legs as though he was swimming, and then, spluttering and half-drowned, he sat up.

Again Mazula laughed, and his officers joined him in his merriment, just as the last victim among the mutineers was sent flying into the air.

A slight thing seemed to amuse the Sea Spider, and he said:

"Well, Señor Gerard, did you think you were overboard?"

"Where are the doomed men?" he gasped, with a quick glance at the plank, which was being removed.

"Overboard."

"Dead?"

"Certainly."

"All of them?"

"Except yourself," was the laconic response of the Sea Spider, and Pierre Gerard shuddered.

He rose quickly to his feet, felt of his wet attire and said:

"I think I fainted."

"I am sure that you did; but you are all right now, so stand ready to take the Death Oath."

The Frenchman was livid, but he bowed his head in silence.

"Bring the altar, Señor Duke," said the Spider.

An order was given by the young officer and four seamen went below.

Soon they returned on deck, bearing a dais, which was spread with black velvet.

Another then bore to the dais a red coffin, and within it was a skeleton form, when the lid was removed so that the Frenchman had a view of what was in it.

"Kneel there, señor, with uncovered head, grasp with your right hand the hand of that skeleton, and hold this cross in your left," and Mazula gave to Pierre Gerard a gold cross, fully a foot in length.

The trembling Frenchman obeyed, and then the Sea Spider said in a voice that was deep and impressive:

"Repeat after me the Death Oath that will make you one of the League of Island Rovers."

"Are you prepared to do so?"

"Yes, señor," and the Frenchman was trembling violently, while his voice was hardly audible.

Then the Sea Spider began to repeat the Death Oath, Pierre Gerard following him word for word, while his right hand grasped tremblingly that of the skeleton in the coffin, and his left held aloft the cross of gold.

It was a fearful oath, one that bound him by his real name, or any alias he might assume, by his religion, be it what it might, his hope of a hereafter, his loves and hates, and all he held dear and sacred in the grave or on earth, to remain true to the League of the Island Rovers.

The sweat stood in great beads upon the face of the man as he repeated after the Sea Spider the fearful Death Oath, and when at last, as he uttered the *finale*, a huge black flag, with the red spider and gold eyes was cast upon him, he fell forward again in a swoon, his head resting upon the skeleton form.

When he recovered he was in the cabin of the Sea Spider and a seaman was bathing his head with fragrant water.

"Where am I?" he gasped.

"On the schooner of the Sea Spider, señor."

"Ah, yes! I recall the fearful ordeal through which I passed."

"I tainted."

"Yes, señor."

"Where is your chief?"

"Our King, señor, for he is your King now."

"Where is he?"

"On deck."

"Can I see him?"

"I will ask him."

The seaman disappeared and soon after Mazula entered.

"Well, señor, you are all right again, I am glad to see."

"Yes, I am myself again, Señor Captain."

"I am your King now, Señor Gerard, so remember to so address me."

"But you need food and wine, as your ordeal the past few days has been a severe one."

"While you refresh yourself I will talk to you, and we will decide as to the future."

"But remember, you are an officer on my vessel now; in fact, you hold the place of third Luff, or mate."

"I thank you, señor—"

"There, you forget what I am to you."

"My King."

"That is right; but here are the refreshments I ordered for you, and when you have broken your fast you will feel stronger."

"That wine is Armatillado, and the best, so do not fear it."

Pierre Gerard ate almost ravenously.

He soon felt better, and Mazula said:

"Now tell me just how to head for the spot where the Rover Queen went down."

"You still have hope of finding her afloat, señor—I mean my King?"

"Oh, yes."

"I am sure she is at the bottom."

"But those on board?"

"Are with her."

"She had boats?"

"All saved half in twain excepting the life-boat we left the brig in."

"Could they not make a raft?"

"They had no time to do so, my King."

"I have great faith in what that young officer could do, and his slave was a bold and resolute man also."

"Yes, my King; but fate was against them."

"Fate can be conquered as can any other foe, if one dares fight it, as I do."

"You are a wonderful man, my King."

Mazula smiled.

He was human and a man, so he liked flattery, come from what source it might.

"Well," he said, after a pause, "I shall fight Fate and find Queen Zulita and those with her, for my faith that she is not dead is most strong."

"Now come on deck and lay our course to where you last saw the Rover Queen."

CHAPTER XV.

FIGHTING FATE.

WHEN the brig Rover Queen was struck by the squall, which preceded the gale, she was thrown upon her beam-ends.

When the attack was made by Pierre Gerard and his mutineers, she had up a great spread

of canvas, so that the force of the wind at once sent her over, for she had been under no helmsman's control when the squall came.

This very thing saved her, for the hole cut in her hull to sink her, was just below the water line forward, and was raised out of the sea by her being upon her beam-ends.

This fact the keen eyes of Paul discovered, and he made the report to his master.

Instantly they ran forward, sprung down into the hold, and though the brig was tossing about fearfully, and threatening to go down, and Zulita was clinging to the raft sail on deck, they worked with such right good-will that the hole was closed up so as to prevent the leak from doing much harm.

Then going on deck Dunbar Kennon and Paul saw that the spray hid all around them from view.

The vessel lay upon her beam-ends, held there by her canvas, which held on, protected as it was by the hull of the brig, and the seas were dashing over her to windward.

Clinging for life under the lee of the bulwark was Zulita, and she welcomed her husband with a shout of joy.

"We have stopped the leak, Zulita, and we will right the ship by cutting the sails loose," he shouted, and armed with hatchets, Dunbar Kennon and Paul made their way aloft and began to cut the halyards.

It was a most perilous work, and, loosened, the sails flapped wildly, and were torn into threads in a very short while.

But cutting them relieved the straining ship, and she righted herself with a lurch that nearly capsized her, and caused the two daring men in her rigging to hold hard to keep from being shaken loose.

But they held on and were soon by the side of Zulita.

The fore storm-staysail alone had been left, and springing to the wheel Dunbar Kennon had gotten the brig's head around and she drove away before the gale like a race-horse.

Thus for hours she went, the seas breaking over her, and the howling tempest carrying her far from the scene where the first gale had struck her.

The bodies of Melville, the mate, and the mutineers had been washed overboard when the brig went on her beam-ends, and so only those three, Dunbar Kennon, Zulita and Paul remained on board.

When the dawn broke the brig was still driving swiftly along, though the storm had abated greatly.

Paul reported that she was leaking but little, and as they could do nothing in that rough sea, they let her drive on as she was headed.

The daylight showed that the boats, which had not been torn from their fastenings, had indeed been rendered useless, by being sawed half in twain by the mutineers.

But the brig was in fair condition, there were plenty of provisions on board and they had little to fear for the present, while they certainly had cause to congratulate themselves upon their wonderful escape thus far.

Paul soon had a good breakfast set, and having dispatched it, all three felt better able to cope with what was before them.

As the skies were overcast, and the storm still continued, though in a limited degree, Dunbar Kennon could not take an observation to discover his reckoning, but supposed that he was driving down toward the Caribbean Sea, a locality which he was anxious to avoid.

But ere any change could be made, another storm came driving along after the one which had carried the brig thus far, and there was little chance of altering the course of the vessel then.

Night came on and the storm increased in fury, and the helpless Rover Queen went scudding before it, those on board not knowing but that she might drive ashore on the coast of Cuba or some smaller island at any moment.

But they kept up a stout heart and hoped for the best, and thus passed another night, none of them getting much rest.

And so it went on, with a succession of gales for days, and at last one night a calm came and Dunbar Kennon and Paul sunk down to rest, utterly worn out, leaving Zulita to watch while the brig, with no sail set, was left to drift where it would.

With little sleep coming to her eyes in the days and nights of hope, despair and watching, Zulita in vain tried to keep her eyes open.

She fought hard against being overcome by sleep, and kept her eyes sweeping the horizon of waters about her.

The sea had run down, there was not a breath of wind and the balmy air lulled to repose, and would have drawn into slumber one less weary than was Zulita.

Suddenly she opened her eyes and thought that she beheld land ahead—perhaps it was a large vessel becalmed; but for her life she could not utter a warning to her husband who lay upon the deck near her so sound asleep that a cannon would hardly have aroused him.

A short distance further forward lay Paul, and the deep breathing that issued from his nostrils told how soundly he slept.

Zulita saw the object ahead, be it land or a large vessel, and it seemed to come upon her senses that she was dreaming, and so she made no outcry, gave no warning.

And on drifted the brig, borne by an inevitable tide, until at length there was heard the sound which is the terror of seamen.

It was a dull roar, such as waves make when breaking upon rocks.

The night was starlight and the sea was visible for a long distance around the brig.

The vessel drifted on, borne by the tide, and in her course loomed up a dark mass.

It was land, a bold and rocky island, and the vessel seemed to set directly upon it.

The sea was calm, there was not a breath to fan the dark hair of the sleeping woman, as she leant upon the taffrail, her head bowed upon her hands, while the brig drifted on to its fate, and the young captain and the negro lay in deepest slumber upon the deck.

Louder and louder grew the sound of breakers, until at last, had those on the brig been awake they could have seen the line of foam which marked where the waves broke upon a ragged reef.

Further on was a rocky island, which rose forbidding and desolate out of the sea.

Nearer and nearer drew the brig to the reef, louder and louder resounded the roar of the breakers.

Yet still not one of the three awoke to realize their danger.

Nearer and nearer, until the craft seemed about to dash into the foaming waters; but no, the tide swept her away and drove her in between the snowy line of waters where there was a break hardly her length in width.

Beyond this encircling barrier of rock, which surrounded the island, the waters were smooth, and the brig still swept on, the current carrying her around the island.

Suddenly Zulita awoke with a start.

Then a wild cry broke from her lips, as she gazed about her, and she called out:

"Oh, Kennon, my husband! we are lost, for we have drifted upon the Island of the Rovers!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DESERTED ISLAND.

The wild cry of Zulita caused Dunbar Kennon and Paul to spring up from their sleep in alarm.

They had not heard the roar of the breakers, for their ears had been too well accustomed to the sound of dashing waters, especially in the storms of the past week.

But the voice of Zulita aroused them in an instant.

Dazed by their deep slumber, they were not at first able to recall where they were.

But after a moment they beheld the brig, Zulita wringing her hands, heard the roar of the waves dashing upon the encircling reef, and beheld the island.

"My God! it is the island of your people," said Dunbar Kennon to Zulita.

She sprang toward him, and said hoarsely:

"Yes, and we are doomed to a fate far worse than what those mutineers meant that we should suffer."

"I fear that, my poor Zulita.

"But what a strange fatality that this brig should have brought us here."

"There is no escape, master."

"No, Paul, for the guns on yonder cliff, you know, command the entrance, even if there was wind enough for us to run out of here, which there is not."

"No, their eyes are upon us, and we cannot escape, Kennon," said Zulita, who always called her husband by his last name.

"How strange that they did not fire upon us as we came in," said Dunbar Kennon.

Zulita started at his words, and replied:

"It is strange; but they doubtless saw that we were drifting in and so waited."

"We will see them before long."

"And the brig is drifting around the island, you see."

"Yes, slowly."

"And where will she drift if not checked, Zulita?"

"The tide sets around the island on both sides, and an unseen hand guided us this way, or we should have gone upon the sunken rocks."

"This way we will drift around to the east end, then upon the sunken reefs and go to pieces."

"I will let go the anchor."

"Well, when we get opposite to the lagoon."

And so they waited, until the brig, hardly a cable's-length from the island, and several times that distance from the encircling barrier of reef and sunken rocks, drew opposite to the inlet, a lagoon, which, as has been mentioned, penetrated the island cliffs upon the south shore.

Here, in the inlet, was the harbor of the Island Rovers' fleet, and that escape was utterly impossible, all three of them knew.

As the anchor was let fall, Dunbar Kennon said suddenly:

"Zulita?"

"Yes, Kennon."

"Do you know I believe the Rovers are all asleep, and our coming in has not been seen."

"It may be," she answered, with considerable interest.

"In that case I can swim ashore into the lagoon, steal a small sailboat and we can make our escape in it, as it is not midnight yet for an hour or more."

"We can try it, Kennon."

"Let me go, master."

"No, Paul, I will go, for the danger is no more than remaining here."

"Get out some maps and stores for the boat, and I will soon be back, I hope."

So saying Dunbar Kennon threw off his shoes and outer clothing, and seizing a rope lowered himself noiselessly into the sea.

He swam shoreward and soon entered the inlet, where the shadows of the overhanging rocks and scrub pines rendered it very dark.

Landing he kept along the shore, turned the bend in the lagoon, and was soon on the shore of the little harbor.

To his surprise, dark as it was, he beheld no vessels at anchor there.

Where was the fleet of the Island Rovers?

Half a hundred vessels had been at anchor there when he had made his escape, and now not a single one met his view.

He could see the whole narrow inlet, and an object attracted his view.

Walking toward it he found that it was a small sloop of ten tons, with a hole stove in her side.

She had been borne up at high tide and left ashore, and stripped of her sails she lay helpless.

"This looks like desertion," he muttered, and he continued on along the shore of the lagoon.

Here a boat, also in bad condition, met his gaze, and upon reaching the end of the inlet, where the waters of the stream from inland flowed into it, he discovered that no other craft was in sight.

"I verily believe the island is deserted," he said.

"Certain it is that the fleet has gone; but there may be some of the Rovers here."

"I cannot make use of either the little sloop or skiff until they are mended, and there is nothing else in which we can make our escape."

"I shall go further and see what I can discover."

So saying he cautiously ascended the steep path leading to the ridge, and reaching the top stood at the Fort, where had been mounted several heavy guns that commanded the entrance to the lagoon.

They had been cleverly concealed from any one on a passing vessel by a false wall of sods, which could be swept away in a few minutes.

But the guns were not there.

"The place is deserted, I am sure."

"Still, I will be certain before I return to the brig," and so saying Dunbar Kennon went along the ridge toward the fort on the cliff, where had been the quarters of Señor Ramon, the comandante, and secretly the executioner.

This fort commanded the entrance into the waters inside the reef, and through which the Rover Queen had safely drifted.

From there also the guns had been removed.

But the quarters of the comandante still remained, the door open, and yet no one seemed to be within.

Down through the village of the Island Rovers the daring young sailor made his way, and not a single sign of any human being dwelling there did he see.

"I will return and tell Zulita that the island has been deserted by her people."

"How strange a fate has brought us to this spot."

And so saying Dunbar Kennon started upon his way back to the shore of the lagoon.

CHAPTER XVII.

ZULITA HAS A SECRET.

WHEN Zulita saw her husband swim away in the darkness a foreboding of evil seized upon her heart.

She had learned to fairly idolize the man whose life she had saved and for whom she had left her people.

Her nature was one to love with all her soul.

Born upon one of the isles where the Rovers had pitched their home, she had been reared by her father with a view of becoming the future queen of her people.

Her father, the son of a pirate chief who had founded the League of Island Rovers, was yet a man of refined nature and education.

He had taught his daughter much, taken her on cruises with him, and she would have been contented to dwell among her people but for the meeting with Dunbar Kennon.

She had had a craving at times for a different life than that of an outlaw queen; but still she was not unhappy, and had persuaded herself that she really loved Mazula, who had been selected as her intended husband, when, lo! across her path came the young American sailor.

And he came, cast ashore in a wreck, owing his life and Paul's to her, and so she loved him.

Loving him, and knowing that he would not take the Death Oath and hence must die, she resolved to rescue him.

To her it was not wrong to tell him of her love and ask him to take her with him and make her his wife. And so she had written him.

But her letter did not suit her, and she wrote again, and the letter she cast aside was the one which Mazula found months after and told him that Queen Zulita was not dead, that the two captives had not taken the Death Leap from the cliff, that the Spray had not foundered at sea, but that all had left the retreat of the Island Rovers.

What followed his discovery the reader will recall, and how, deserting his island and moving his people to another retreat, Mazula, as the Sea Spider, began to track down the fugitive Queen and her lover.

Feeling that Dunbar Kennon loved her, Zulita had clung to him the more after he was disowned by his father, and in his love she was happy, content to go with him in his vessel.

Now that they had met with such a remarkable escape from death, and a strange fatality seemed to have driven them directly back to the island of her people, Zulita felt the deepest anxiety as to the result.

She knew that a fearful death at the hands of her people would await her, as well as Dunbar Kennon and Paul.

Sae had broken her oath in flying from her people, she had committed a crime against them in setting the two prisoners free, and she knew that forgiveness to her could never come from them.

The Island Rovers were merciless, she well knew, for she had been forced to be merciless herself.

And so Zulita hung over the bulwarks and watched and waited for the return of her husband.

Paul stood near, silent and anxious.

No sound, other than the surf, reached their ears, and the time seemed to drag along on leaden wings.

"He has been gone an hour, Paul," said Zulita, anxiously.

"Yes, missy; but I guess he'll soon come back," responded Paul, who had great faith in the master to whom he had clung through all, since the time when, a middy, he had bought him from a cruel master, when the war-vessel to which Dunbar Kennon was attached dropped anchor in a Southern port.

"I hope so," was the response of Zulita, and again she peered into the dense darkness shoreward.

As the time dragged along she grew more and more anxious.

Could her husband have been taken prisoner by the Rovers? she wondered.

If aught of harm befell him, she wished to suffer also.

She would not have accepted her life at the sacrifice of his, for without Dunbar Kennon, her idol, she wished to die.

The brig was in fair condition, and had the winds been light, while out at sea, Dunbar Kennon, aided by herself and Paul, might have run in safety into some port.

But they could not get the brig out to sea from there, she was certain, even had there been a breeze.

Did he return in a small boat they would be able to leave the island, and so she watched and hoped for his return.

At last her eyes fell upon an object upon the waters.

It was a boat, and in it was one person.

"It is Kennon," she said, eagerly, and Paul sprung to the brig's side, just as Dunbar Kennon came alongside in the skiff, which he had patched up as best he could to run out to the brig in.

"Help me to haul the skiff on deck, Paul, for we have to repair it before it is fit for use," he said aloud, and Zulita chided him that he was not more cautious.

"No need of it, my sweet wife, for the island is deserted," he said.

"Deserted, Kennon?" she cried, eagerly.

"Yes, Zulita, as far as I could discover there is not a soul on the island, the guns have been taken from the forts and all is deserted."

"Oh, Kennon! can you mean what you say?"

"Yes, Zulita."

"Then we are saved."

"Thus far, yes, unless there be some one on the island whom I did not discover."

"It may be, and yet I can hardly think that any one would remain."

"The Rovers have sought another island retreat, as is the wont of my people."

"Perhaps they know that you did not commit suicide, but escaped with me."

"Perhaps, though it was all so well planned by you, my sweet Zulita, that I can hardly believe the plot was discovered."

"Still it might have been, and the Rovers, fearing that I would bring a fleet against them, have departed."

"Yet Señor Ramon promised, if it became known that I did not commit suicide, and escaped with you, to write a letter to the address

you gave him, and he would have managed to get it posted in some way, I am sure."

"Yes, for he was faithful; but let us hope that the island is deserted, and Paul and myself will go to work upon this skiff and patch it up for use."

"Kennon?"

"Yes, Zulita."

"If the island is deserted, I have a secret to tell you."

"A secret, Zulita?"

"Yes, one of the deepest import," and the manner of Zulita was most impressive as she uttered the words, and Dunbar Kennon and Paul both wondered what this strange secret could be.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE TRUTH MADE KNOWN.

FARMER FRANK FAIRFIELD had played a bold game, and one to win.

He was a strange man, this handsome young farmer, who had been left a large fortune, which had come down to father and son among the Fairfields for several generations.

Not a shadow had fallen upon the name, through any acts of the Fairfields before the one who figures in this romance became master of Cedar Hall.

He had chosen the sea, and his father had gotten him a midshipman's berth in the navy.

After a short service he had, to the surprise of all, resigned and come home.

Why, no one knew, and his excuse was that he was simply tired of the service.

Money was his idol, and he had set to work to make more than the inheritance he had received allowed him.

His father having died, he was master of all; but he would not fit up his fine old home, and hoarded up his gold like a miser.

Then it was that he met Di Douglass, by being saved from drowning by her, and for awhile he was her devoted slave.

But Valerie Rossmore came to Cloudlands, as the ward of old Captain Kennon, and she was not only very beautiful, but an heiress, it was said.

So Frank Fairfield turned toward her, and plotted to free himself by fraud and falsehood from Di Douglass.

It seemed strange that when Dunbar Kennon returned home, Frank Fairfield ceased visiting at Cloudlands.

The neighbors wondered, for the two had been midshipmen together on the same vessel.

Then came the announced engagement of Dunbar Kennon and Valerie Rossmore, and a duel followed between the rivals, which well-nigh cost Frank Fairfield his life.

To the home of Di Douglass the wounded man was taken, at his own request, and, nursed back to life by her devotion, he again tried to cast her off when he was well again.

He believed that he had caused Di Douglass to feel that their marriage was illegal, and he thought that he had so well covered up his tracks that no proof of the ceremony could be found.

But he knew not the nature of the woman he had deceived.

She had risked her life to save him, that day of storm on the Hudson, and she had devoted herself to him for weeks, day and night, when he lay wounded in her father's humble little home.

She had loved him with all her soul, and she was not one to be trifled with with impunity by any one.

And so Di Douglass had gone upon her mission to see if she had been inveigled into a false marriage as he had asserted.

She had heard that, as Dunbar Kennon had brought home with him a wife, had been disowned and made penniless, and then reported to be lost at sea, Valerie Rossmore had promised to marry Frank Fairfield.

She had demanded the truth of him, and he had told her that it was so, and that she, Di, was nothing to him.

She had been perfectly calm, a calmness that he took for resignation to affairs as they existed; but he had deceived her as to the time of his intended marriage to Valerie Rossmore, and thus, when she returned from tracking the truth to save her honor, she was horrified to find that the designing man who was secretly her husband had dared to marry openly the beautiful young mistress of Cloudlands.

For a while Di knew not what to say or do.

Against Valerie she felt no ill-will; but toward her wicked husband she began to experience the direst hatred.

At last she made up her mind to her course, and mounting her horse she rode over to Cloudlands.

Valerie, the fair bride of a week, was there alone, Frank Fairfield having ridden over to his home of Cedar Hall, which he had determined to dispose of at a large sum, as he had become master of Cloudlands.

The scene between the two women, both cruelly wronged by Frank Fairfield, was a strange one, and the look of anguish upon the beautiful face of Valerie Rossmore won the deepest sympathy of Di, who quickly said:

"I am willing to do all that you wish, Miss Rossmore, in this matter."

"Are you?" was the quick and eager response.

"Indeed I am."

"You have been made to suffer deeply by this man."

"Do you love him now?"

"No, I hate him."

"Do you wish to claim him as your husband?"

"I would sooner die."

"Are you revengeful?"

"I fear that I am."

"Will you leave his punishment to me?"

"If you so wish; but what will his punishment be?"

"No one knows of your marriage to this man other than the clergyman and sexton."

"Not a soul."

"Do you wish it known?"

"Under no circumstances."

"Very well, leave all in my hands, and you will not be a loser thereby."

"We will be friends, too, will we not?"

"If you wish it."

And Di's eyes filled with tears.

Valerie drew the girl toward her and kissed her, and then said:

"Here comes Mr. Fairfield now."

"Remember, all is in my hands."

"Yes, all."

And as Di uttered the words Frank Fairfield ascended the broad steps of Cloudland Mansion and was face to face with the two women whom he had so cruelly deceived.

Half an hour after he rode away from Cloudlands, mounted upon his spirited horse and just as the shadows of night were falling.

The horse was found the next day crushed to death on the rocks at the base of the cliff overhanging the Hudson, and it was believed by all that the wild animal had dashed over the precipice with his rider, whose body had been swept away by the river, never to be found, and with the sympathy of all, Valerie Rossmore, a supposed widow, lived once more alone in the grand Cloudlands Mansion, while no one suspected Di Douglass of being the real widow of the young farmer.

But as the days went by many wondered at the strange friendship that had sprung up between the haughty mistress of Cloudlands and the poor maiden at River Vale Farm, little dreaming of the secret bond between the two.

CHAPTER XIX.

ON THE RIGHT COURSE.

AFTER all that he had passed through since leaving New York to carry out his diabolical plot to put Dunbar Kennon to death, Pierre Gerard was very glad to feel that he had not only escaped with his life, but was the ally of the famous and dreaded Sea Spider, as well as an officer upon his vessel.

Hegave the exact latitude and longitude of the Rover Queen at the time of the mutiny, and thither the schooner headed.

But there was of course no trace of the vessel to be found, and taking the course from which the storm had come, the Sea Spider determined to run down it to see if the brig might not have been righted and been driven before it.

"But if she righted, my King, she would have sunk, as a hole had been cut in her hull forward," urged Pierre Gerard.

"In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, yes, Señor Gerard; but you forget that Captain Kennon was no ordinary man, and then, too, his slave was an extraordinary personage."

"Then, too, we have the mate, who you said sided with his captain, and the Queen, Zulita, is one who certainly is to be relied upon in a case such as the one in which they found themselves."

"I still believe the brig did not go down, Señor Gerard."

And so the schooner held on, following the track of the storm, and, as though to show the Sea Spider that he was right, a boat was found adrift, which had been torn from the davits of a vessel.

The boat floated low in the water, was two-thirds full, and, upon being picked up was found to be half-sawed in twain.

This boat, Gerard said, was one of those from the brig, and had the Sea Spider doubted the truth of the Frenchman's story before, this seemed proof that he had told only what was true in regard to the mutiny upon the Rover Queen.

The next day some floating wreckage was found, and in the midst of it was a flag, which Pierre Gerard said was the private signal of the brig.

"We are on the right track, señor, and this wreckage, being simply top hamper, which you see has been cut loose, not torn, or blown out, proves to me that the brig did not founder, as you believed," said Mazula.

"It certainly appears so, my King."

Still following the course of the storm, several vessels were sighted and upon being chased down reported how the gale had struck them, and they gave its course.

Mazula was too eager to catch the brig to de-

lay to rob the little coasting West Indian craft, and, to the delight and surprise of their skippers they were set free.

Thus the trail was followed up over the trackless waters, until after many days the schooner was in the Caribbean Sea, cruising in search of the Rover Queen, which all now believed to be afloat, as several vessels had been spoken and told just how the storm had swept for hundreds of miles around the western end of Cuba, and thence down into Southern waters.

One afternoon a brig was sighted, and at once all was excitement on board the schooner, for it was supposed to be the Rover Queen.

But Pierre Gerard, after a long look through his glass, reported that the stranger was not the craft they sought.

Chase was at once given, however, and the fleet schooner quickly got within range of the brig, which was spreading all sail in the hope of escaping from the craft which all on board knew must be a pirate.

Seeing that the brig set the Stars and Stripes, the Sea Spider did the same, fired a gun for her to come to, and sent a boat on board with Officer Duke dressed up in the uniform of a lieutenant in the Navy of the United States.

The deception proved satisfactory, for the skipper of the brig believed that he had run from an American cruiser, and reported that he was bound from Monte Video to Boston, and had passed, several days before, a brig, which seemed to have been worsted by a storm.

He saw but several persons on board, one appearing to be a woman, and she was going along under only her lower sails, while her foretopmast was blown away.

As he dreaded pirates he had given her a wide berth, and that she had signaled for no aid he was very glad of.

Describing the vessel as well as he could, and the course that she was on, the captain treated Señor Duke right royally and was allowed to go on his way, wondering why the United States Government had vessels that so closely resembled pirate craft.

When Pierre Gerard heard the description of the brig, as given by Duke, he said, excitedly:

"You are right, my King, for that craft is none other than the Rover Queen, which has escaped in some miraculous manner."

"Well, we are on the right course, and we must find her, that is all."

"When did he see her, Señor Duke?"

"Four days ago, my King."

"And how was she heading then?"

"North by east, sir, with a head wind."

"Well, that would carry her toward our old retreat, and I would not be surprised if Dunbar Kennon has gone there," said the Sea Spider.

"Would he not fear to find you there, my King?" asked Officer Balbo.

"It might be so, and yet Queen Zulita would expect us to depart from the island, if she felt that we had discovered her cheat."

"The brig certainly was on a course that would carry her within twenty leagues of it, and yet we have had several gales in the past few days, and it is hard to tell where to look for the craft; but I am not to be thwarted, so let the schooner be run on a course for the old Island and Retreat, and we will see if I am right."

The schooner was put on a course to carry her near the island of the Rovers, and, though a day or two of rough weather drove her off of it a few leagues, she held on her way until one night, just at sunset, the cliffs were sighted.

Here she lay to, not wishing to be seen by any one who might be on the island; but after night had fallen, she held on her course, and running through the break in the reef, dropped anchor in the little lagoon harbor soon after midnight.

"I felt I was right, Señor Gerard, for there lies the Rover Queen at anchor," said the Sea Spider, in a low, exultant voice, as he pointed through the darkness to a brig at anchor not a cable's-length further up the lagoon.

CHAPTER XX.

THE ROVER KING'S TREASURE.

WHEN the dawn came upon the island retreat, the three persons upon the brig were eagerly glancing ashore, to discover if there was any sign of a human being having remained behind when the Rovers departed.

Dunbar Kennon felt that if so, he held the advantage, by being on the brig, as he did not believe that there was a boat in the lagoon, other than the sloop with a hole stove in her side.

As there were plenty of arms, muskets and pistols, and two small guns on the brig, they could defend themselves from an ordinary force, while they had the means of going to sea, if driven to it, in the little surf skiff, which Dunbar Kennon and Paul had most skillfully repaired during the night, put a mast and sail in and provisioned with all that was needed for a couple of weeks' run, in which time he hoped they could reach an island port of the West Indies.

Of course he knew the danger of their going to sea in so small a boat, but if it came to the worst, they could do so.

When the daylight came they searched the shore for some sign of life; but as no one appeared,

ed, Dunbar Kennon entered the boat to pull ashore, first pointing one of the cannon shoreward to cover his retreat, and setting Paul to man it.

But he landed in safety, and after a thorough search of the island, became convinced that there was no one there, that all the Rovers had departed.

So he returned to the brig and took Paul and Zulita ashore.

While the latter took a walk over the island, the young captain and Paul set to work to get the brig into the lagoon, fearing that she might be seen from a vessel, should one pass the island, and also she was in danger of being wrecked, if a storm were to spring up from that quarter.

To get up the anchor was impossible, for it was beyond the strength of two men to man the windlass; but the cable was slipped and the brig was slowly towed into the lagoon, and there moored by ropes stretching on either side to trees on the shore.

This was tedious work, and it was nearly noon before the brig was in safety.

Then Dunbar Kennon set Paul to work upon the little sloop, with the remark:

"That is the craft, Paul, in which we must leave this island, and I wish to delay here no longer than is necessary."

"No, master, for the Rovers might land here any day, so we'll get the boat in trim," was the answer.

There were plenty of tools on board the brig, with wood to work with, spars and canvas, and Paul was a good ship-carpenter along with his other accomplishments.

The sloop, as I have said, was some ten tons burden, and lay where at high tide she would float into deeper water.

There was quite a hole in her starboard side, at the water-line, and excepting her mast and the bowsprit she had no spars, while she had been stripped of her rig and canvas.

But she was otherwise in perfect condition, and Paul set to work with a will to cut out the crushed planking and set in new, while Dunbar Kennon started off in search of Zulita, about whom he suddenly began to feel anxious, as she had been gone for several hours.

From place to place he went, on the island, calling her name, and at last had an answer from the round structure known as the Red House, where the Three Wise Men, the judges of the Island Rovers, dispensed justice, or punishment for minor offenses committed by the people.

The Hall of Justice was an odd structure, round, painted red and black, and with a thatched roof, in which were skylights, for there were no windows in the walls and only one door.

This door was open, and entering it Dunbar Kennon beheld his wife.

She was kneeling at the side of the dais or bench, on which the Three Wise Men had sat in judgment when there, and she had removed it from its former place.

Before her, as he entered the place, he noticed that the earth had been removed to the depth of several feet, and she was leaning over, still getting out the earth with an old shovel.

"Why, Zulita, what are you doing?" he asked, in surprise.

"You have been gone for hours; and I was alarmed about you, fearing that after all some one had been on the island."

"Have I been gone so long, Kennon?"

"I hardly knew it, for I have been so busy," she said, rising and standing by his side.

He saw that her manner was suppressed, her face flushed, and there was a strange look in her eyes.

"My dear Zulita, are you ill, for your face is flushed, as from fever?"

"I fear you have had to bear too much of late," and he took her hand in a way that showed his anxiety for her.

"No, Kennon, I am not ill in the heart, unless it be from joy."

"Do you see there?" and she pointed down into the hole at her feet.

"Yes."

"Let me tell you a secret, tell you that we need no longer poor."

"What do you mean, Zulita?"

"I mean that the Island Rovers' King has a certain share of all gold that is gotten by his people."

"This was a law made by my grandfather, and when he died he left my father a very handsome fortune in treasure."

"My father in turn left it to me, along with what he had accumulated during his long rule as King of the Island Rovers."

"This treasure, in gold and jewels, with costly jewelry and silverware, he hid on this island, and I alone held the secret."

He placed it here, before the Rovers landed and built the Red House over it.

"All this I knew, but I could not get the gold before I left, and so I told you my fortune was lost to me."

"When you told me that this island was deserted by the Rovers I feared for my treasure; but I came here, and all seemed undisturbed."

"I found this old shovel, moved the dais and

went to work, and there is the iron box and the treasure is within it, Kennon."

"Now do you wonder at my joy, for it is ours, my noble husband, ours, to do with as we wish, and if you lost your fortune from marrying me, I have brought you one that will replace it."

And as she spoke Zulita threw her arms around the neck of Dunbar Kennon and burst into tears.

CHAPTER XXI.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

FOR some moments neither Zulita nor Dunbar Kennon spoke.

The woman seemed too full of happiness to do more than weep for joy, and into the heart of the man came a flash of feeling almost amounting to revenge.

It came upon him that if this treasure was as great as Zulita believed, he would like to return to the vicinity of Cloudlands and make his home there, living in a style that would create envy among those who might have rejoiced at his ill-fortune.

At last he said:

"Zulita, have you any idea of how large this treasure is, or rather what it represents in gold?"

"No, Kennon; but I know that it is a large sum."

"But there is the box, so let us get it out and you can see."

Throwing out more of the earth, Dunbar Kennon saw an iron box some two feet in length and eighteen inches in breadth, and noted that it was equally as deep as it was broad.

He attempted to raise it from the hole, but could not do so, and Zulita ran off to call Paul.

She soon returned with him, and the negro brought a rope and stout pole with him.

His eyes opened wide as he beheld the iron box, for Zulita had told him about it, and he quickly fastened one end of the rope into the handle of the box, and the united strength of the two men raised it from the hole where it had so long been buried.

Hanging it on the pole between them, they started for the shore, Zulita remaining to smooth back the earth as before and place the dais over it, though what impelled her to do so she could not tell.

With the tools from the brig Paul quickly opened the stout lock, and the lid being raised, the three who gazed down upon the treasure revealed to their eyes uttered a cry of amazement and delight commingled.

"It is the fortune of a king," cried Dunbar Kennon, with enthusiasm.

"My father was a King, Kennon," said Zulita, as she knelt and took up a handful of gems from the box.

It was indeed a king's treasure, and just such as a pirate king might be expected to have laid by.

There was a large quantity of precious stones, rubies, diamonds, emeralds and gems of lesser value, along with leather bags of gold, jewelry of the richest and most costly kind, and any quantity of silver plate, cups, goblets and tankards, with a massive salver, which had been bent out of shape to be made to fit into the box.

"Zulita, the fortune I would have gotten from my father was not one-twentieth what this is in value," said Dunbar Kennon, as he looked over the rich treasure, taking out piece by piece, bag by bag and examined them.

"I am so glad, Kennon, for now you can be rich and more," was the low reply.

"And what shall I do with it, Zulita?"

"Take it with us, and buy Cloudlands," she said quickly.

"Ah! if we only could," he sadly replied.

"And why can you not?"

"I fear Cloudlands is not for sale."

"To you, no! but let another make the purchase, for a good price will get it I feel sure."

"But, Kennon, do not let us remain an instant longer upon this island than there is need for, as one of our cruisers might run in here at any time, and then we are lost."

Her warning had the desired effect, for the discovery of the treasure had driven work entirely out of the heads of both Dunbar Kennon and Paul.

But thus warned they quickly made canvas bags and filled them with the riches, after which they stowed them away in the hold of the little sloop under the ceiling.

Then they measured the spars for a suit of sails, and Zulita began to make them, sewing the thick canvas with a celerity and skill hardly expected of one with her small hands.

While Paul worked at the hole in the side of the sloop, Dunbar Kennon wove the rigging on the mast and spars, and Zulita sewed on the sails, so that darkness found them getting the little craft well on the way toward readiness to go to sea within thirty-six hours.

That night, in the cabin of the brig, they all three worked on the sails and rigging, and when they retired that night that much at least was done.

Before noon the next day the rigging was woven on, the sails were bent, and by night the repairs were completed and the sloop was afloat and moored alongside of the brig.

Utterly worn out they all sought rest, but at dawn began the work of provisioning the sloop from the brig's stores, and fitting her out for a long cruise.

To his delight Dunbar Kennon saw that Paul had done his work so well that the hull did not leak, and he felt that they would all be quite comfortable on their voyage in the little craft, their greatest danger being a dread of capture from some cruiser of the Island Rovers, or a West Indian buccaneer, which were often seen in these waters.

When all was in readiness, and all that they cared to take with them from the brig, had been placed on the little sloop, Dunbar Kennon and Zulita took a walk together to have a last look at the island.

They reached the cliff, and as he cast his eyes out over the sea Dunbar Kennon started, for his gaze fell upon a distant sail.

It was a long way off, but he had his glass with him and he saw that the craft was a schooner and her course lay directly toward the island retreat.

"Zulita, take my glass and see if that is one of your old cruisers," he said, quietly.

She obeyed, and after a while said:

"Kennon, I do not recognize the vessel at this distance; but it is an American schooner, and Mazula was having a craft of that kind built when we fled from the island."

"She is coming this way, and before we can run out in the sloop she will be near enough to catch us."

"Yes, if we are discovered; but with this breeze it will be some time after dark before she gets to the channel through the reefs, and we could run out, perhaps, and not be seen by her."

"If we could go either side of the island, after running out, yes; but there are sunken rocks which will cause us to sail a mile out before we can head away, and we will then have to beat, with the wind where it is."

"You are right, Zulita; but we will have to run out and take the chances, for we can do nothing else."

"Kennon, what does the sloop draw?"

"Four feet."

"Let me see how the tide is."

"Running in, and it will be high tide within an hour."

"Over on the other side of the island there is a break in the reef, and I have often sailed through it in my skiff; but at high tide the men have said there is something over four feet of water there, so we might all get in the skiff to lighten the sloop, and tow her over, and that would put us five leagues ahead of yonder craft."

"What do you say, Kennon?"

"We must force the sloop through at all hazards, Zulita."

"Come, let us lose no time, for yonder schooner is coming on rapidly."

If they waited longer they would have seen the schooner lay to, and come no nearer the island then, so that there might have been a chance to run out of the channel and escape under cover of the darkness; but this they did not see, and so hurried down the hill, congratulating themselves that they had gone up to take a last look, as they had intended sailing at dawn.

"Come, Paul, there is a suspicious-looking schooner in the offing, and we must run out at once; but we will tow the sloop across the waters between here and the reef," said Dunbar Kennon, and Paul sprung to work with a will to get all ready.

The little anchor was raised, the skiff with two pairs of oars gotten out ahead, with a strong tow-line, and with Zulita at the tiller of the sloop the two men took their oars and began to tow out.

The brig, which had served them so well, was waved a sad farewell and then the start was made.

Out of the lagoon they went, and then around the island toward the little break in the reef upon which their hopes were now centered.

It was a hard pull across the quieter waters, within the circling reef; but Zulita directed the rowers how to hold their course, and soon they drew near the break in the reef.

It was scarcely twelve feet in width, and the waters were boiling about it; but fortunately it was under the lee of the island and there was no sea on, or stiff wind blowing.

Springing into the sea, while Paul held the sloop against the tide, from going upon the reef, Dunbar Kennon swam to the break and felt for bottom.

He found it, just touching with his toes, while the water was up to his neck.

"We can make it, I think," he called out, and after making sure of just where was the deepest depth, he swam back to the sloop.

After placing all into the little skiff that it would stand, to lighten the sloop all he could, Dunbar Kennon returned to his oars and the venture was made.

Nearer and nearer they drew to the break, Zulita now at the tiller of the skiff, and with a short tow-line out, and in another moment they were in the rough waters.

But the strong-armed oarsmen never faltered, though the skiff tossed wildly for a moment, and after an instant of great suspense a cheer broke from the trio, for the sloop had passed over in safety.

Thus it was that the Sea Spider, upon entering the lagoon three hours after did not find the fugitives upon the deserted Rovers' Island.

CHAPTER XXII.

TO BE RUN DOWN.

WHEN the Sea Spider dropped anchor in the lagoon, not a cable's length from the brig Rover Queen, he seemed in no hurry to act, for he gave orders to be called at sunrise and retired to his cabin to rest.

He knew well that to escape from the island those who were on it would have to have a boat, and that the brig's were useless he was well aware from what Pierre Gerard had told him, while he remembered that only a stove-in sloop and skiff with a hole in her bow had been left at the retreat by his people when they had departed.

So he would rest content, feeling perfectly sure of the four fugitives, for he counted the mate as being along, for it will be remembered that Pierre Gerard did not know of Melville's death.

"They will be safe enough, and I have them in my power," he said, as he threw himself down to sleep.

But sleep did not come to the eyes of the Sea Spider.

He could take human life and rest serenely after it; but within a short distance of him, as he believed, was a woman who had been his idol since his boyhood.

He had loved Zulita since she was a little girl of six and he a boy of fourteen.

He had watched her grow into girlhood, maid-hood and then, as a woman he had made her his idol.

She had fled from him and with another, and yet he loved her; but still he meant to have his revenge upon her.

The man for whom she had forsaken him should die by the vilest torture; this he had made up his mind to.

The others with her must also die by torture; but as to Zulita, he had it in his power to spare her life, for he would use that power as King of the Island Rovers.

His revenge upon her would be in slaying Dunbar Kennon, and his mercy to her would be in sparing her life.

And so he tossed about on his bed until dawn, sleep driven from his eyes by his bitter thoughts, and at last arose and went on deck.

The day was dawning, and he aroused his men for action.

He ate his breakfast, and accompanied by Pierre Gerard in his gig, bade Officer Duke follow in a large boat with a score of seamen and told him that there were to be no fire-arms taken, for the fugitives were not to be slain under any circumstances.

As he reached the shore he did not note that both the skiff and sloop were gone, though he recalled it afterward with an imprecation at the fact.

Up the hill he went into the interior of the island, spreading his men out as a search-party, while he and Pierre Gerard went to the Flag Ship quarters, where had been Zulita's home and his.

Officer Balbo, sent on board the brig while the party to land were getting ready to leave the schooner, had reported that the Rover Queen was deserted, at anchor, and also made fast by chain-cables to the trees ashore.

This convinced the Sea Spider that those whom he sought were ashore.

But the Flag Ship was empty and just as he had left it half a year before.

The forts were also untenanted, and the searching-party came and reported that they had gone into every cabin and nowhere were the fugitives to be found.

Sending the party on another search, the Sea Spider, with angry face, went back to the shore with Pierre Gerard and was put on board the Rover Queen.

"This is certainly the craft," he said.

"Oh, yes, my King, there is no doubt of that," responded the Frenchman.

"Then they must be on board here."

And hailing the schooner he ordered a dozen Rovers sent aboard the brig to search her.

This was done, and not a place was left unlooked into where even a child could have hidden.

As this report was made Duke came from the island and told the Sea Spider that every crevice and cabin ashore had been searched without result.

A curse came from the lips of Mazula at this, and he stood with angry face regarding the shore.

Suddenly he started, and his voice rang out like a trumpet as he cried:

"Ho, men! Where are the boats that were left here?"

"There was a sloop, my King, stove in on the side, and a surf-skiff with a hole in her bow, as I recall them."

"The same, Señor Duke, and they are gone." Shavings and pieces of wood, cut with carpenters' tools, were seen ashore now, with fragments of canvas, cut ropes and pieces of rigging.

Then there was a tar-pot and brush, oakum, and other evidences that men had been at work repairing a vessel.

"They have gone, and in the sloop."

"I told you, Señor Gerard, that that American was a man of experience and pluck."

"He has repaired the skiff and sloop and sailed with all speed."

"Ho, men, get aboard the schooner for we sail at once," cried Mazula.

"And the brig, my King?" asked Pierre Gerard.

"Will remain here."

"She has a valuable cargo on board, my King, which has doubtless not suffered much."

"What care I for the cargo?"

"The craft will remain here, for there is no one to take her away."

"Here, Señor Duke, put my colors upon her, to show any of my cruiser captains that may come in here that she is my prize, and we will leave her for another visit."

The order was obeyed, a few small articles were taken from the brig, and in fifteen minutes after the schooner was on her way out to sea again.

"That man is not one to easily get the best of."

"He has hardly been more than three days at the island, and yet he has repaired the sloop and skiff, rigged the former with a set of canvas, stored her from the brig and gone to sea."

"But I shall run him down, I vow it!" and the Sea Spider gritted his teeth with angry resolution.

"My King, may not the Queen Zulita have recovered her father's treasure while here, for she certainly did not carry it with her when she fled," suggested Balbo.

"Curses! yes! that is why they came here in the brig."

"They have gone, and with a treasure that would enrich a king."

"Ho, lads, keep your eyes wide open, for the sloop is to be taken."

"Which course, my King?"

After an instant of thought the Sea Spider said:

"In that small craft they would seek the nearest port without doubt, so head for the West Indies, Señor Balbo—ah! I have it! head at once through the Windward Passage, for the Rovers' Island, and I will put every one of my cruisers upon the track of the sloop, for they shall not escape me!" and all saw that Mazula their King was in deadly earnest.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE PURSUIT.

UPON leaving the old island retreat, the Sea Spider had shaped his course for his new home, though on the way he had searched diligently for the sloop containing the fugitives.

He had reasoned that with Zulita on board, and also a vast treasure, which he felt sure the Queen of the Rovers had not failed to take with her, Dunbar Kennon would try and reach some convenient port, back to the United States, or leaving his little sloop take passage upon some vessel bound to New York or New Orleans.

For this reason he was anxious to reach his island retreat and send every one of his cruisers in chase.

He had two cruiser craft, which he could dispatch with orders to his cruiser captains, to hunt for the little sloop, and also to bombard and thoroughly search every craft sailing southward.

With the cruisers that he expected to find at the island, and the small vessels there, which he meant to dispatch at once in search of the fugitives, he felt that it would be a miracle if they escaped him, especially as they could hardly have had more than twenty-four hours' start of him.

"I will form a barrier of search vessels, from Vera Cruz to the most eastward of the West Indian Islands, and I am sure I will catch them," he said to Paul Gerard.

So the Sea Spider was crowded along under full sail, and searched the island retreat after a very rapid run.

One of the cruisers of the Island Rovers had been spoken on the way, and the Sea Spider had given the captain instructions as to what he was to do.

The new retreat of the Rovers was an island of the West Indies, which certainly had been well chosen by the Sea Spider.

About it, for many leagues, was a perfect archipelago of reefs and sunken reefs, so that it would take a bold mariner indeed to attempt to sail a craft through its perilous channels.

Still, when flying from a man-of-war one day the Sea Spider had boldly risked wreck, rather than death, or capture, and his keen eyes had discovered that which many another man would have failed to do, and that was that a passage could be made through the dangerous reef and rock islands, by great care being taken and certain steering points marked out.

On his cruise, while looking for a passage on through this archipelago of rocky isles, he came upon the large island which had struck him as the very place for a retreat for his people.

It was hard to reach the spot, but in small boats he did so, and there, to his surprise, found a score of men who had been left there years before by Brule, the Buccaneer.

It had been the retreat of that famous sea rover, and his booty depot, and he had left a guard there of crippled men from his crew.

Having been run down by an American cruiser, Brule, the Buccaneer, had never returned to his island rendezvous, and the men he left there still remained, for the old outlaw did not allow them so much as a skiff in which they could play him false and leave with his booty.

There was no material on the island with which to build a boat, and so the score of pirates had been forced to remain there for years.

But they had planted grain and vegetables, and had fruit in abundance, while they could catch all the fish they wished from simply throwing in their lines, or nets, from the rocks.

It was a large island, with a small cove in the shape of a horseshoe on the southern shore, which formed a safe harbor, and there was plenty of good spring water and rich land which would grow almost anything.

Learning from the Sea Spider of the death of Brule the Buccaneer, their chief, the outlaws were very willing to ally themselves with the Island Rovers, and were left upon their retreat, which was made a rendezvous by the Sea Spider's cruisers.

A channel was marked out on certain rocks and islands, as a hunter makes a blaze on a tree to follow a trail, and in this way, by day, the island could be reached.

Such was the spot to which the Sea Spider had removed his people, after leaving the island in the Caribbean Sea.

The change had not been regretted, for their new home was equally as pleasant a dwelling-place, and it certainly was fully as difficult of access.

By night not one of the captains would dare attempt the channel; but by day it was not so difficult with the marked islands to serve as guides to the pilots.

The island coast was bold and inaccessible, no boat being able to make a landing, except in the cove, where the shore was a sandy beach, and the entrance to this little harbor had been guarded by the heavy guns brought from the forts on the island in the Caribbean, so that a vessel coming in would have to face a severe fire, while no craft drawing over fifteen feet would dare venture within range of the battery, owing to the shoals and shallow water in the channel.

With their topmasts housed the largest cruisers of the Rovers' fleet could lie hidden in the harbor, for they could not be seen above the tree-tops, and so the new home was equally as desirable as the old one.

When nearing his retreat others of his little fleet were met by the Sea Spider and at once dispatched to head off any craft bound northward, and to form a chain from Cape Catorche in Yucatan to the Turk Islands.

Arriving at his retreat, the Sea Spider was given a salute by the fort, and at once landing sought the Señor Luka, the commandante of the island, and Señor Ramon, the commander of the fort, and who, it will be remembered, was secretly the executioner.

"Seniors, I have been on the track of the Queen Zulita and her husband, and they are now seeking to return to the States in a small sloop, having been to our old island and gotten the treasure of our former King."

"I wish every craft that is available to go at once to sea, and search for the sloop on its way northward, and also to bring to every north-bound vessel they dare to, and see if they bear the fugitives."

"Señor Luka, see to this at once, for I sail immediately, and dispatch my courier vessels to hunt up my cruisers and give them the same instructions."

With these orders the Sea Spider returned on board the schooner and at once set sail in search of the fugitive sloop, and, guided by a strange good fortune, two days after sighted the very little craft he sought.

"Destiny has guided them into my hands," he said, in a voice hoarse with suppressed emotion.

CHAPTER XXIV.

HOPE AND DESPAIR.

IT seemed strange that the Sea Spider, of all those who had been put on the water for the fugitive sloop, should be the one to discover the little craft.

Mazula had argued well, that if Dunbar Kennon did not seek some port in Jamaica, St. Domingo or the southern coast of Cuba, he would take the windward passage and thus make his way to Havana or some place in Florida.

So he had headed his schooner so as to be on the alert for any craft thus going northward.

Upon the afternoon of the third day after leaving his island retreat a lookout had suddenly started all by the cry:

"Sail, ho!"

Instantly all was excitement on the schooner, and the Sea Spider came bounding on deck.

The schooner was moving along at scarcely a four-knot pace, for the wind was very light and the sea like glass in its smoothness.

The afternoon was extremely sultry, and a hazy look to the westward indicated a brewing storm.

The lookout had been lulled to drowsiness by the sultry air or he would sooner have discovered the strange sail.

Some six miles distant it was visible, and it was barely moving along under the light breeze and running away from the schooner.

This showed that it had just seen the schooner and had put away in flight.

Visible from the deck, the eyes of the Sea Spider quickly fell upon it, and there was an angry glare upon his face.

"Ho, aloft there!" he shouted.

"Ay, ay, sir!" came in a trembling voice from the lookout.

"Why did you not report that craft half an hour ago?"

"I just saw her, my King."

"You were asleep."

"Come down from aloft!"

The frightened man obeyed, and as he was coming down the Sea Spider turned to Officer Balbo, who was officer of the watch.

"You should have seen that craft, Señor Balbo."

"I did not, my King."

"Do you know what she is?"

"The sloop, my King."

"True, and we might have lost her, for she is running into yonder haze and could have escaped us."

"Take your sword, sir, and execute that man, for you both must be punished, as I will allow no lack of discipline, you well know."

The officer turned pale, but obeyed, while the unfortunate lookout stepped forward with bowed head.

"Muster the crew, Señor Gerard, to witness punishment," came the order.

Pierre Gerard quickly obeyed.

"Now, Señor Balbo, drive your blade into that man's heart."

The officer seemed to shrink from obeying, for he was at heart a plucky fellow and hated to kill a defenseless man.

"Did you hear, Señor Balbo?"

"Yes, my King."

And the officer felt of the point of his blade and stepped toward the man.

The latter did not shrink, his face showed fear, for it was livid, but yet he controlled all emotions and calmly awaited his fate.

He knew that the Death Oath of the Island Rovers made the law of their king paramount to all.

He could but obey and so he waited.

Pierre Gerard had not witnessed what power the Sea Spider held before, and he wondered if there was to be no word against it.

But there was not, from officer, man or crew, and with a sweep of his sword, as though to nerve his hand for the red work, Señor Balbo drove it deep into the heart of the victim.

There was a piercing cry of anguish, a grasping of the blade by the nerveless hands, and the man who had failed in his duty fell dead upon the deck.

"Throw the body into the sea, and Señor Balbo, put the schooner away in chase of yonder sloop," came the quiet order of the Sea Spider.

Pierre Gerard shuddered, and he mused:

"That man is merciless indeed."

But suddenly there came a flapping of the sails, and the breeze, as though in punishment for the deed done, deserted the beautiful vessel.

The sloop was visible now, hardly more than a league away, for the wind seemed to have quite deserted her.

She had every stitch of canvas set, and yet it flapped idly about, while the sloop rolled upon the ocean swell holding no steerage-way.

In vain did the Rover King glance up at his sails, hoping to see them fill with wind.

There was not a breath of air, and he knew that there would not be until the gathering storm broke upon the sea.

Taking his most powerful glass he called to Pierre Gerard and went aloft.

After a long look at the sloop he handed the glass to the Frenchman with the remark:

"Tell me what you make out upon that craft?"

"Three persons, my King," said Pierre Gerard, after a close scrutiny through the glass.

"Name them."

"I see Captain Dunbar Kennon, my King."

"Yes."

"And the señora."

"Queen Zulita?"

"Yes, my King."

"Well?"

"And the negro, Paul."

"Yes."

"No one else, my King."

"You cannot be mistaken in those three!"

"No, my King."

"You are sure?"

"Yes, my King."

"So am I."

"Come!"

He led the way down to the deck and ordered a boat lowered.

"But, my King, see you not the storm approaching?" urged Officer Balbo, and he pointed to the gathering gloom, and the darkening clouds to the westward.

"I can reach the sloop before the storm breaks."

"No, my King, it will be impossible."

"I will not lose the craft, Señor Balbo."

"There is no need to, my King, for you can shorten sail and stand on with the first breath of air."

"The sloop cannot escape you, as it will be several hours before nightfall, and in the mean time you can get a boat out ahead and tow nearer the craft."

"You are right, Balbo, for it would be madness to run in the face of this coming gale far from the schooner."

"Order out the long boat to tow the schooner as far as we can, and have all ready to recall it at an instant's notice, and strip the vessel to meet the tempest."

These orders were quickly executed, and with a boat out ahead, moved by the impulse of eight strong oarsmen, the Sea Spider went along at a slow pace over the sea.

She had also been stripped to her fore-staysail and close-reefed mainsail, while all had been made ready to meet the gale.

The air now became most oppressive, and the inky storm-clouds darkened the light of day.

In the direction from whence the storm must break lay the little sloop; but excepting to take in her topsail and jib she seemed to make no preparation to meet the tempest.

"He keeps up his canvas to run away from us with the first puff of wind," said Pierre Gerard.

"Yes; but he'll capsize as certain as he keeps up that much canvas," answered the Sea Spider.

Those on board the sloop could now be distinctly seen, and the naked eye revealed the fact that there were but three persons, one of them being a woman, the other a negro, and the third a white man.

That they were other than Dunbar Kennon, Zulita and Paul there could be no doubt.

"Where is the mate, Melville?" asked Pierre Gerard.

"Perhaps ill in the cabin," replied Mazula, whose spirits seemed to rise as he felt sure of his prey.

"Ha! there comes the storm! ho, the boat! come aboard with all haste!" suddenly called out the King.

This was done, and the boat was at its davits in a very short while.

"Señor Balbo, look to the safety of the schooner, for I shall watch yonder sloop," cried the Sea Spider.

Then from his lips came the cry:

"Ha! the storm shuts her out from my view, and she is wrecked, I am sure."

"Hold hard! it is upon us!"

CHAPTER XXV.

LOST AND FOUND.

THE storm, which struck the Island Rovers' schooner Sea Spider, was a remarkable one, for though threatening for some time it came with a rush that left little time to meet it.

The sloop disappeared suddenly, and it was the opinion of all on board the schooner that, carrying the sail she had up, she had gone over.

The schooner met the storm well, however, bent to its force for an instant, until she was almost upon her beam-ends, and then bounded away into its very teeth, the storm-sails set driving her along at a terrific speed.

Mazula had fixed the locality of the sloop firmly in his mind, and noting the force and direction of the storm, held his vessel on a course which he knew must bring her near the little craft, whether it had been wrecked or not.

Every eye was on the lookout, and after a short run, which must have brought his vessel close to the sloop the Sea Spider gave the order to lay her to.

This was done with an ease which not only showed the stanch qualities of the fleet craft, but also the most skillful handling of her crew.

Hardly had she come to when there was a break in the inky clouds, and the tempest had swept by.

"We got only the corner of the tornado, Señor Gerard," said Mazula, as he strained his eyes over the waters.

"Yes, my King; it was more severe yonder where you see those black clouds," and the Frenchman pointed in the direction from whence the schooner had just come.

"It was even lighter for the sloop than we had it, as she was near the edge; but I fear she went down."

Hardly had the words left Mazula's lips when there came from aloft:

"Wreck, ho!"

"Ay, ay, I see it."

"Get the schooner under way at once, men, for it is the sloop, and she's over."

The order was hardly necessary, for the men had sprung to their posts when the cry of "wreck, ho" had shown them the wrecked sloop.

She was not a quarter of a mile from the schooner, and lay over on her side, her sails flat upon the sea.

The waves were breaking over her, and it could not be that she would long remain afloat as she then was, for she must go down, or, her mast snapping off, turn bottom upward.

The wind was still fresh, and the sea, fanned by the tempest into fury, if only for a short while, was running high.

But the schooner forged through the waters at a rapid rate, and soon luffed up near the wreck.

"Man the life-boat!"

Mazula gave the command, and he was ready to go in it himself.

No one was visible upon the sloop, as the life-boat pulled rapidly toward it.

"They were washed off when the storm struck them, and are lost!"

Mazula's face was livid, and his cruel lips quivered as he uttered the words.

A few moments before he had had the fugitives almost in his very grasp, and now they were at the bottom of the sea.

The little sloop was recognized by all in the boat, as was also the skiff, which was tossing about, full of water, and held to the capsized craft by the wreckage.

The topsail had become full of air, and like a balloon was upholding the mast, aided by the mainmast and jib which lay flat upon the waters.

But the cabin had been washed open and the forehatch washed off, so that the wreck must soon go down.

But yet, in his dismay and fury combined, Mazula ordered the life-boat near and sprung out upon the wreck.

"Curses! they are lost! lost!" he cried, and his men dared not look into his face, it writhed so with passion, hatred and disappointment.

Suddenly there came a warning cry from Pierre Gerard:

"The wreck is going down, my King!

"Spring for your life!"

The Sea Spider obeyed, and struck out with strong strokes toward the life-boat.

Quickly Pierre Gerard seized a rope and threw it to him, and it was just in time, for as he grasped it he was caught in the whirlpool of the sinking craft and nearly dragged down as it was.

The life-boat danced wildly upon the waters, and there was an instant of horror, as all feared it would go under, dragged into the seething caldron.

But it resisted the force of the waves, and though the fierce pull upon him nearly broke his hold on the rope, Mazula was not torn loose and the next instant was dragged into the boat by Pierre Gerard and one of the seamen.

"Men, you very nearly lost your king, for the wreckage would have dragged me down with it to the depths of the sea."

"Sefior Gerard, I owe you my life."

The Sea Spider spoke calmly, but all in the boat saw that he had fully realized his peril, and but for the rope thrown him by the Frenchman, his life would have ended right there and then.

"I am glad to have saved my King," replied Pierre Gerard, and the crew of the life-boat broke forth in a cheer, which was answered by the men on the schooner, who had seen all that had occurred.

Returning to the schooner the life-boat was hauled up, and every man was put on the watch while the craft sailed about the locality in search of those who had been on the sloop, should any of them still be alive.

But darkness soon settled down upon the sea, and not a trace was found of those who had been upon the sloop, so that Mazula was forced to give them up as lost.

It was a bitter blow to him to have to yield to the truth that Zulita was beyond his love, and Dunbar Kennon had escaped his revenge.

But it was forced upon him by what he felt was beyond all doubt, and he sadly gave the order to stand away for the Florida Coast, where he hoped to picked up some richly-freighted vessel, the capture of which would serve as a balm upon his wounded feelings.

In truth the Island Rovers' King was throwing off the mask of being secretly a pirate, which his people had so long acted under.

They had only sought vessels which would not cause suspicion to fall upon them, and so cautious had been the little fleet of outlaw cruisers in their deeds of outlawry that proof of their crimes had seldom been proven upon them, though they were constantly under suspicion, and the eye of vessels-of-war of all nations.

But since becoming King, Mazula, in his fleet American-built schooner, with its splendid armament and large crew, had struck many

hard blows at commerce on the seas, and cruel ones, too, and in the mood in which the loss of Zulita, his love and revenge left him, he meant to drown his feelings by busier action in his wicked career.

Having run across the Gulf and found no prize that he considered a rich one, and being short of ammunition, he determined to capture a coaster and send Pierre Gerard with a small crew up to New Orleans in it after what supplies he needed.

A lugger was taken with a cargo of lumber out of Pascagoula, and the Frenchman and six men put on board and started upon the run for New Orleans to play honest men, while the Sea Spider went into a place of hiding on the coast to await their return.

Though trusting Pierre Gerard and feeling most kindly toward him since he had saved his life, Mazula had given the crew, each one of them who accompanied him, orders to watch him like a hawk and to kill him if they saw any sign upon his part of an intention to give them the slip.

For ten days the lugger was gone, and then one day it was sighted returning under all the canvas it could stand up under.

Rapidly it ran in-shore where the schooner lay at anchor, and as Pierre Gerard sprung upon the deck of the Sea Spider he cried, excitedly:

"Oh, my King! they are not dead, for I saw them in New Orleans!"

"Saw whom?" shouted the Sea Spider.

"Queen Zulita, Dunbar Kennon and the negro Paul!" was the startling response of Pierre Gerard.

CHAPTER XXVI.

FOUND AT SEA.

ONCE Dunbar Kennon had gotten his little sloop over the reef he spread sail and sped away in flight.

The wind was light, but the little vessel was a fair sailer, and certainly a very good sea-boat, so if they were not overhauled by any of the outlaw craft in those waters they need have no fear of reaching a port of the United States in safety.

The little craft bowled along at a five-knot pace, while the Sea Spider was running into the lagoon, little dreaming that his prey had so cleverly eluded him.

Up through the windward passage to the eastward of the Island of Cuba, the sloop held her way, Paul, as before, acting as cook, steward and seaman, and Dunbar Kennon as skipper and sailor combined, while Zulita helped in various ways.

She was a good sailor, understood a boat thoroughly, and could have managed the sloop herself, so she often took her trick at the wheel while her husband and Paul were asleep.

The scenes through which they had passed gave them little time for rest, so that they were weary yet determined, and the rest which Zulita's aid allowed them was very acceptable.

After rounding the Island of Cuba, which they left some dozen leagues away on their port, an object was discovered one morning far out upon the waters.

Toward it Zulita, who was at the helm sailing on a given course which Dunbar Kennon had directed her to steer, at once headed, for she saw that it was a boat adrift.

She did not care to awaken her husband, or Paul, until necessary, and as the wind was fresh felt no dread of not being able to run away from those in the boat, should they meditate mischief.

As she drew nearer she saw that the boat had a flag up, but there was no sail, or oars, and not a soul was visible on board.

When within a quarter of a mile of it she called to her husband.

He was upon his feet in an instant, and Paul was also aroused and sprung up.

"There is a boat adrift, Kennon, and I headed toward it; but it does not appear to be occupied," she said.

He saw the boat, turned his glass upon it and said:

"It is the life-boat of some large vessel—and I think we will find it occupied by a dead crew."

"We will bear down upon it and see."

They were soon near, and Paul sprung on board, and, as Dunbar Kennon had feared, there were occupants found in it, but they were dead.

There were three of them, seamen, whose dark faces indicated that they were Spaniards, and their attire was that of a marine and sailors of the Spanish Navy.

"They are from a Spanish vessel-of-war, doubtless deserters who were blown out to sea."

"I will bury them in the sea, Zulita."

Then some old iron ballast was taken from the sloop and attached to each one, the bodies were wrapped in pieces of canvas and tied up and then consigned to the depths, while Dunbar Kennon, in his deep, impressive voice repeated the service of the dead over them.

That they had died of starvation was certain, for not a scrap of food or drop of water was

found on the boat, and one of them had about his wrist a pair of manacles, which seemed to tell the story that the other two had aided his escape and deserted with him.

"What will you do with the boat, master?" asked Paul.

Dunbar Kennon saw that the boat was a very fine one.

It was a life-boat, some eighteen feet in length, high in the bows and stern, very deep and one to stand very rough weather, for it was decked over forward and surrounded by a high combing to keep out the waves.

There was a step in it for a small mast, and it could safely carry twenty persons.

"We have a skiff, so we may as well cast it adrift," he said.

"No, Kennon, let us take it in tow, for we may need it," urged Zulita.

"You are right, Zulita, we may, and as we are in no hurry we will not mind the delay that towing it will cause."

So the boat was taken in tow and the little sloop continued on her course as before.

The next afternoon Dunbar Kennon was at the helm, and Zulita was asleep in the cabin, while Paul lay forward upon a coil of ropes slumbering soundly.

At night they all were wont to keep awake, for they knew that they were in a dangerous locality for not only pirates, but storms.

Suddenly Dunbar Kennon's eyes fell upon a distant sail.

It was a schooner, and a glance showed him that her look was suspicious.

Instantly he called to Paul and put away from her.

He had been watching an approaching storm, and knew that it must strike them before very long.

The wind was very light, the sea smooth, and toward the westward there was a dense haze, the forerunner of the storm that was coming from that direction.

Straight toward the hazy horizon he headed, and while Zulita, aroused by the voice of her husband came on deck and took the helm, Dunbar Kennon turned his glass upon the strange sail.

"They have not sighted us yet, Zulita, for she still holds on her course, as when I first saw her."

"Ah! I know the craft, and it is the one that we saw from the cliff of the island."

"Then it must be, as I said, the vessel of Mazula, and he is in pursuit of us, for he found the brig there, and the sloop gone, for he must have remembered leaving this little craft there," Zulita replied, and her face became anxious.

"Well, if we can get into that haze we will escape him, for he has not yet sighted us."

"But the wind is dying down."

"True, and will soon leave us."

"Then they will come in their boats and capture us."

"Yes, I fear so; but we have the life-boat, thanks to your begging me to bring it along, Zulita."

"I am so glad; but would you desert the sloop?"

"The life-boat will be as safe as the sloop in the storm, Zulita, the coast of Cuba is not very many leagues away, and we can reach it."

"But our treasure?"

Dunbar Kennon made no reply for a moment and then he said:

"I have it! I shall try a ruse on them, if we have to, and it will only be in case they sight us, which they have not yet done."

"What is it, Kennon, that you will do?" she asked, anxiously.

He answered slowly:

"Zulita, that craft carries a flag we know."

"Well?"

"The colors of Mazula were a black ground, with a huge red spider in the center."

"Alas, yes."

"That is his craft, then, so we know from whom we are flying."

"We are lost, my husband."

"Ah no, Zulita, we have not yet been seen, and the chances are in our favor, with the life-boat, the storm approaching and the calm."

"I cannot see it, I must admit," she said, sadly.

"I will show you my ruse."

"Paul?"

"Yes, master."

"Haul the life-boat alongside forward, and make it fast."

"Yes, master."

This was done, and then relinquishing the helm to Zulita, Dunbar Kennon and Paul set to work and stowed the treasure-bags in the life-boat, after which they put in provisions, and bedding to make themselves comfortable.

Two of the small water-casks then followed and spars that would serve as a mast and bowsprit for the life-boat, with pieces of canvas, of which they had plenty on board the sloop, to make sails.

This had hardly been done when a cry from Zulita showed that the schooner had sighted them and was in pursuit.

"This wind will not last them long, and the

haze ahead of us is deepening, so we may yet dodge them," quietly said Dunbar Kennon.

In half an hour more the sloop lay becalmed upon the waters, while the schooner still came on.

But only for a short distance, and she too lay motionless, except to roll on the swell of the sea.

"Paul, take in the topsail," said Dunbar Kennon.

This was done, and both Zulita and the negro looked anxiously at the one upon whom so much depended.

He was perfectly calm and said:

"They will hardly dare venture this far in their boat, in face of yonder coming tempest, so will hope to keep us in sight during the storm.

"But we are nearer the storm, and it will strike us first, and so we will be concealed by the haze from the schooner some minutes before it is upon us, and in that time we can act."

"But what can we do, Kennon?"

"Wait, Zulita, and see, for you have not long to wait—see, they have gotten a boat out ahead, and are turning the schooner toward us," and at sight of this act of those on the schooner, Zulita dropped her face in her hands and seemed almost to despair.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE SPIDER AND THE FLY.

"Don't be blue, little woman, for we are not caught yet," said Dunbar Kennon hopefully, when he saw that the splendid nerve which Zulita had shown throughout was about to fail her.

"No, missy, spiders don't catch every fly they tries for in their web, and I guess we flies will escape that Spider," remarked Paul, and Zulita laughed at the simile, and replied in her old way:

"Well, Paul, we are not in the Spider's web yet, so there is hope for us."

"I think so, for sea, they are calling their boat in, as they see that the storm must break soon."

"Zulita!"

"Yes, Kennon."

"Get into the life-boat, and you, Paul, do the same, unfastening the stern-line, and having all ready to cast off, when I give the order."

"And the sloop, Kennon?"

"I will leave her with sails up as she is, for she will go over when the storm strikes her, and we might as well be supposed to be lost as not."

Zulita gave a little cry of joy as she saw what the ruse of her husband was, and Paul laughed.

They knew that the life-boat was even better than the sloop, to face the coming storm in, and it would indeed be a bright idea for them to be believed to be lost by the Sea Spider.

The life-boat had been hauled alongside of the sloop, before the latter had been sighted by those on the schooner, so had not been seen, as Dunbar Kennon had kept his craft so as to hide it.

Thus, with the sloop and skiff found capsized, or seen to go over, the Sea Spider would suppose those on board lost, and this was just what they wished the Island Rovers to believe, for that they had discovered Zulita's deception about her pretended suicide, and her flight with Dunbar Kennon, she felt assured.

The storm was now close upon them, and Dunbar Kennon's skilled eye noted the fact that they were in the outer edge of it and would not get the worst of the tornado.

The schooner was a mile further down toward the center, and must feel the blow more severely than did the sloop, and with the darkness that came with it, the haze and rough sea, Dunbar Kennon hoped that the life-boat would escape observation.

Nearer and nearer came the tempest, until the murky air preceding it shut the sloop out of sight of the schooner.

This was just what Dunbar Kennon had looked for, and with a bound he was in the life-boat, and the oars sent them off from the lo.

An instant more and the tempest was upon them.

Dunbar Kennon was at the tiller of the life-boat and met the gale head on.

High in air the bows of the boat were raised upon the wall of foaming waters, and for a moment it seemed that it must be dashed bottom upward.

But it had been well ballasted and perfectly trimmed, and met the shock nobly, and at once Paul got out his oars to get her head around, while Dunbar Kennon, giving the tiller to Zulita, raised the little mast and sail of the skiff, which had been brought along just for that purpose.

It presented but a few yards of canvas to the breeze, but it was sufficient to send the boat driving along at a furious pace.

"There goes the schooner, and she is heading for the sloop," said Dunbar Kennon, as he beheld the Sea Spider, reefed down, dashing into the very teeth of the gale.

"They were not seen by any one or boat & the

schooner, for in fact in the driving mist and semi-darkness the tornado caused, they could hardly see the large vessel.

"I saw the sloop go over, master," Paul said.

"Yes, so did I, and we will be thought to have gone with her," was the grim reply.

Driving along for a couple of leagues, with the tempest, Dunbar Kennon was at the same time keeping the life-boat edging off to starboard, hoping to run out of the gale, the greatest fury of which he knew was far to port.

In an hour after the first blow of the tempest, he had gotten out of it, and though the wind yet blew fresh, and sea was rough, he held no dread of the result.

It was just sunset, and far off in the westward, relieved against the bright sky, the schooner was visible slowly cruising about.

"It is just about where the storm struck us, and they have found the sloop and are looking for us.

"They can hardly see us here, but we will lower the little sail," said Dunbar Kennon, and it was quickly done, and the life-boat was left tossing about upon the waters.

But darkness was coming on, and as soon as the sea was shut in by its shadows, the larger mast and sail were raised, the bowsprit put in place, the jib set, and the life-boat went bowing along toward the Cuban Coast at an eight-knot pace.

It was just dawn when they ran into a little cove, and here came to anchor for a rest for the day, and Dunbar Kennon determined to sail only by night, and to make for Havana, from whence he could get passage in some vessel bound to the United States.

Had he not had the treasure on board, he might have risked the run in the life-boat, hoping, if picked up, all would be well.

But he knew that with such a temptation as those bags of riches, they would be sacrificed for them, did they happen to meet with any one who would feel no compunction to thus getting a fortune.

So to Havana they went, running by night, and it was just after dark when they entered port, and Dunbar Kennon reported to the harbor-master that his vessel had been wrecked, and that he, his wife and negro cook, had alone escaped, and were anxious to take passage to the States.

A packet ship was to sail at dawn for New Orleans, and upon this they took passage, Dunbar Kennon first sending Paul into the town to purchase several trunks in which to pack their things.

As a shipwrecked party those on board the ship did not suspect them of possessing vast riches in the old trunks brought on board, and so they were not looked upon as other than they represented themselves.

Arriving at New Orleans they went to a hotel to rest a few days and then take passage for New York, and it was while there that Pierre Gerard had discovered them and beat a hasty retreat, not caring to be seen by them.

Thus it was that the Spider had not caught the fly in their case; but that he spun another web, when he heard what Pierre Gerard said, will be soon revealed.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A CHANGE OF OWNERS.

WHETHER it was from bitter memories that haunted her at Cloudlands, or not, it was certain that Valerie Rossmore, or Mrs. Valerie Fairfield, as the neighbors knew her, was going to change her home.

Some said that she remembered her guardian constantly, when present where he had lived and been so good to her, and thus she was anxious to get away from where she was not in constant remembrance of him.

Others said that she still loved Dunbar Kennon and wished to see if she could not forget him by changing her abode.

Again it was said that she was haunted by her short life of wedded happiness with Frank Fairfield, and the terrible death that he had met with when his horse had dashed over the cliff with him.

At any rate Valerie did not intend to remain at Cloudlands.

Nor did she intend to take possession of her supposed husband's home of Cedar Hall, which was but little inferior to Cloudlands.

Instead, she intended to make for herself a new home.

Upon the banks of the river, between Cloudlands and Cedar Hall, was a half-completed structure which had been intended by its builder to be as lordly as a castle.

But he had died ere it was half-finished, and it had been left to go to ruin.

There were several hundred acres about it, superb grounds had been laid out, and out-houses built, and altogether it would be an elegant home if built up.

The grounds sloped down to the river, and the highway ran around it in such a way as to keep the structure in sight of those passing along the road for half a mile.

Then the scenery was beautiful thereabout, and in the valley to the right was visible the

cupola on Cedar Hall, a mile and a half away, while to the left, upon the hill two miles distant, loomed up Cloudlands, with its massive columns and towers.

Not very far from the new place also was River Vale Farm, the home of Di Douglass, and a pretty walk through the woods led directly to it.

This spot Valerie had often admired, and she had ridden to the half-built ruin many a time and lingered there for hours, enjoying the beautiful scenery, and planning just what she would have done to beautify it, had the place been her own.

One day, soon after the ride which Frank Fairfield had taken from Cloudlands after being confronted by Di Douglass with the proofs of his perfidy, and commanded to depart by Valerie, under pain of going to prison if he remained, she had decided to purchase the half-built structure, with its adjacent lands, and erect it to suit herself.

The purchase was made at a low figure, and scores of workmen were at once placed upon the mansion, grounds and outhouses, and no expense was spared to make it all that its beautiful mistress could wish.

What she would do with the three finest homes in the country, Cloudlands, Cedar Hall and The Retreat, as she called her new home, no one could understand; but certain it is that she took great pleasure in overlooking the work each day, planning to suit herself, and often her companion and adviser was Di Douglass, between whom and herself there was such a strange bond of friendship, a bond of sympathy which they alone knew.

As the house neared completion, Valerie returned to Cloudlands one afternoon, congratulating herself that within another week she could move into the creation of her own fancy, and found there a visitor awaiting her.

He represented himself as an agent from the city, and said that he was seeking to purchase a home for a gentleman of wealth and had been directed to her as one who might be willing to sell.

"I had never thought of so doing; but I might as well let Cloudlands go," she replied, while she spoke in a manner that showed her thoughts were far away.

"You have but to name your price, Mrs. Fairfield," said the agent.

"It will be a large one, for Cloudlands has no equal as a home in the State."

"I am prepared to pay its worth, without demur, madam."

"You represent a rich man, then, for I value Cloudlands at one hundred thousand dollars, with its adjoining lands."

"Does that include its furniture?"

"No, for I will take that with me to my new home, sir."

"What is the furniture worth?"

"It would cost me fifteen thousand dollars to replace it."

"If you will leave the place as it now is, with furniture, paintings, silver service and all, excepting your personal effects, I will give you one hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars in cash for it, madam."

Valerie was surprised.

She was indeed selling to one who had money, and she knew that the figure was a large one, for in those early days quarter-of-a-million-dollar mansions were not built as now, and all things were cheaper.

"I will accept your offer, sir," she said.

"Then, madam, if you will send for your attorney I am prepared to make the purchase at once."

Valerie rang a bell and sent the carriage to the town for Lawyer Lockwood, with a note explaining what she wished, and the agent of the man who could pay an eighth of a million cash for a house amused himself in strolling about the estate.

In good time Lawyer Lockwood arrived, the papers were drawn up, satisfactory drafts paid in for the property, and Cloudlands changed hands.

The new owner of the estate appeared only in the name of the agent, and when asked who the real purchaser was he said that he was not at liberty to state just then, but that he would be found a great addition to the community.

The next day Valerie moved over to Cedar Hall to await the entire completion of her new home, and a week after she was told that the new master of Cloudlands was having the place overhauled regardless of expense and was sending a large number of servants, horses and carriages there.

Following this information came a visitor to Cedar Hall.

This visitor was also from the city and an agent to purchase property.

In fact, he came to buy Cedar Hall from its mistress.

Here Valerie was in a quandary.

She did not wish to sell a property which she knew was not her own.

True, as the supposed widow of Frank Fairfield she had administered upon his estate, and Di Douglass had so urged her to do, and for the sake of the beautiful woman who had, like her,

The Rival Monte Cristos.

been deceived, Di would not let the secret be known.

So she refused to sell the place.

The agent insisted, and offered a most tempting price.

But Valerie asked for time and sent at once for Di Douglass.

Asking her to her room she told her the situation as it was.

Di was also in a quandary, for she did not understand law, but thought that to dispose of the place would not cause any trouble, even if the secret of Frank Fairfield's double marriage did come out.

So it was decided to let Cedar Hall go, and Valerie was to be the receiver of the money, while Di Douglass, the real wife of Frank Fairfield, somehow seemed to feel that she held no interest in the estate of her husband, leaving all to the fair mistress in possession.

And thus Cedar Hall was sold, furniture and all, and Valerie hastened to get into her new home.

Hardly had she furnished it and become settled there, when it was reported that the new master of Cloudlands had arrived.

She was most anxious to see him, this man of such vast wealth, and so took a drive that afternoon, directing her coachman to pass by Cloudlands.

As she drove by the porter's lodge, hoping to catch a glimpse of the newcomer and his wife, she bade the coachman drive at a walk that she might note any change that had been made.

That changes had been made, she noted at a glance, and for the better, and she was glad to feel that the neighborhood was to be added to by the coming of a gentleman and his wife, who the agent had told her were refined and most delightful people.

Then too it had been told her that the new owner of Cedar Hall was a bachelor, one who had traveled much and possessed a vast fortune, and Valerie was glad that she would be able to go again into society when her year of mourning was ended.

As she was thinking of this the porter who sat in the door of his lodge, politely raised his hat to her.

She saw that he was a stranger, evidently having come to Cloudlands with its new master, so she called to her coachman to halt and beckoned to the man to approach.

She was curious to know the name of the purchaser of her old home, and which the agent had declined to divulge.

"My man, the owner of Cloudlands has arrived, I bear!"

"Yes, lady."

"May I ask if he likes his new home?"

"He is delighted with it, my lady."

"And his wife?"

"She also is charmed with the place, so the butler tells me, my lady."

"Will you please tell me his name?"

"My master and mistress are coming this way now, lady, as you see."

He pointed to a little clump of trees not far distant, through which wound a pathway, and along it came two persons.

One glance at them, and Valerie cried hoarsely:

"Are those two your master and mistress?"

"Yes, my lady."

A startled cry came from the lips of Valerie, and then:

"Drive on, quick."

The command was sternly uttered, and the coachman obeyed, as she sunk with pallid lips back upon the cushions, while from between her shut teeth came the words:

"My God! they are Dunbar Kennon and his Mexican wife!"

"The sea has given up its dead!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE SEA GIVES UP ITS DEAD.

"DRIVE faster, Richard!" and the coachman was startled, so changed was the soft voice of his beautiful mistress, into one that was harsh and cold.

He obeyed, and glancing back upon the cushioned seat saw that Valerie was white as a ghost and her teeth were set hard together, while the hands that rested upon the sides of the carriage trembled violently.

"You are ill, my lady," said Richard in a kindly tone, wondering at the change in the beautiful woman, which a few moments had brought.

"Yes, drive faster, for I wish to get home at once!"

The coachman hurried his spirited horses still more, and soon the vehicle drew up at the door of The Retreat, and Valerie almost tottered up the steps of the elegant mansion, while Di Douglass, who had walked over from her home came quickly forward to meet her, for she had been seated upon the piazza awaiting her return.

"You look ill, Valerie," she said, for so she had been asked to call her.

"Come into the library with me," was the hourse reply, and then she added: "Order the butler to bring me a glass of wine, quick, or I shall faint."

Di ran and got the wine herself, and when

Valerie had dashed it down at a draught, she took off her bonnet and wrap.

She saw by the white face and quivering lips that something had occurred to unnerve her, but she bided her time, asking no questions.

The wine soon revived the woman, and she said:

"Di, I have seen the new master of Cloudlands."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, I have seen him."

"What is he like?"

"He is none other than Dunbar Kennon."

Di sprung to her feet in amazement.

She believed that Dunbar Kennon and his wife were at the bottom of the sea.

So all the neighborhood had believed, for since the sailing of the Rover Queen nothing had been heard of her.

Some had said that she had foundered in a storm, and others that she had been captured by pirates and all on board slain.

Certain it was that she had not been heard of since her departure from New York, and those who had known Dunbar Kennon had mourned for his sad end.

The superstition regarding the ship having been one of ill-omen was talked over, with the story of the crew that had deserted her at the moment of sailing.

Knowing Dunbar Kennon as she had, Di Douglass had greatly admired him, and Valerie had confessed to her, but for the belief that he was dead, she would never have wedded Frank Fairfield.

Now Di was told that Dunbar Kennon was not only alive, but the master of Cloudlands.

She looked at Valerie in astonishment, while she asked:

"Can this be true?"

"It is, for I saw him, and her."

"His wife?"

"Yes."

"I am so happy that they were not lost."

"Di, I hate her, and, as it is, rather than that he should return to find that I was the widow, as all suppose, of Frank Fairfield, I would have had him at the bottom of the sea," and Valerie spoke almost fiercely.

"Oh, Valerie!"

"I mean it, for I wedded that man only because I believed Dunbar Kennon dead."

"Well, it is too late to sorrow over it now."

"I fear it is; but if his wife was dead, I believe I could win him again."

She had said this more to herself than to Di; but the latter caught the word and said:

"Well, Valerie, she is not dead, so you can do nothing else than submit to the inevitable, as both of us have done in the past."

"But, when did you see him?"

"An hour ago, for I drove by Cloudlands."

"Not to the place?"

"No, but I saw the porter in front of the lodge, and stopped to speak with him."

"As I did so, he pointed to his master and mistress, who appeared in sight beyond the hawthorn bridge, coming along the path leading from the gardens."

"To my horror I beheld Dunbar Kennon and his wife, and I bade Richard drive home with a haste, for I felt as though I was choking to death."

"You saw them at a distance, Valerie?"

"They were not sixty paces away, just by the linden-tree."

"Can you not have been mistaken?"

"Mistake Dunbar Kennon for any other man?"

"It might be."

"I never could make such a mistake, Di Douglass."

"And the porter said that he was his master?"

"Yes."

"But how could it be?"

"I do not know; but it is."

"He left here as master of a merchant-brig a poor man."

"I know it."

"And returns with money enough to pay that sum he did for Cloudlands?"

"So it seems."

"There must be some mistake."

"There is none."

"He had no fortune, except from his father?"

"None; and that was all left to me."

"Perhaps his wife was rich?"

"Then why did he go as master of the brig and take her with him?"

"I cannot understand it."

"Nor I; but the fact remains that he was not lost, if the brig was, and neither was his wife, and they are here now, master and mistress of Cloudlands."

"Oh! had I suspected who was the purchaser, I would not have sold it to him for a million dollars!"

And Valerie bit her teeth with vexation.

"It is done now; but did not Monsieur Pierre Gerard sail with Captain Kennon in the brig, for it seen that I heard so?"

"Yes; and was supposed to be lost."

"I can hardly believe that it can be Dunbar Kennon that you saw."

"Then it is his double, or his ghost."

Both were silent for a few moments and then Di Douglass said:

"Valerie, it is a strange coincidence; but I came over here this afternoon to tell you that I had seen the new master of Cedar Hall."

"Indeed?"

"Yes; he rode up to our house this morning and asked for a drink of water."

"I carried it to him, and he certainly is a most remarkable-looking man, for, without appearing old, his hair is snow-white, as also is the long mustache that he wears, while his eyes are large and intensely black."

"He must be very handsome indeed."

"He certainly is, and he was very courtly in his manner toward me, and said that he hoped some time to have the honor of seeing me again; but what is his name, Valerie?"

"Here is his card his agent gave me—and he is a Mexican."

Di Douglass took the card and read aloud:

"DON MONTE BANCO,

"Mexico."

CHAPTER XXX.

A PLOT FOR REVENGE.

WHEN Dunbar Kennon arrived in New York, accompanied by his beautiful wife and the faithful Paul, he made up his mind to one course.

This he talked over with Zulita, and she was only too happy in acquiescing in any wish that he might carry out.

The packet vessel on which they had taken passage at New Orleans had brought them in safety to New York, and Dunbar Kennon had at once sought secluded quarters in the city until he should arrange his plans for the future.

He had deposited his treasures in a bank, after having them valued by those who were competent judges, and he was amazed to find himself many times a millionaire, for Zulita had given all into his hands.

Disposing of the gold as a bank deposit to draw on at will, he told his plans to Zulita.

"You know, my sweet wife," he had said, "that it was a bitter blow for me to give up my old home of Cloudlands?

"My father, and two generations before him, were born there, and I dearly loved the old home, while the ashes of those dear to me, my mother and all, lie in the family burying-ground on the estate."

"My father was a remarkably stern man, and between him and myself there was no bond of love such as should be between a parent and his child."

"I was therefore glad to be at sea, and did not enjoy my visits home, though I dearly loved the dear old place."

"When Valerie Rossmore came to live at Cloudlands, I was surprised to see the change in my father."

"He said that she was a kinswoman, and yet it was never exactly clear to me just how; but then, I was little versed in my kindred."

"To make her happy father fitted up the old mansion and grounds, filled the house with servants, the stables with horses and carriages, and refurnished the entire establishment."

"I was glad of this, for it seemed to change his nature and make him happy, and upon my return home I was treated with the greatest affection by him."

"He seemed set upon my marrying Valerie, and, beautiful and fascinating, she won my heart, as I believed, and we became engaged."

"You know the result, and that a duel followed about her with Frank Fairfield."

"I returned home with you, my noble little wife, and the result was that I was driven out, disowned, disinherited, and Cloudlands went, with all my fortune, to Valerie Rossmore, who my father told me was already possessed of a large fortune."

"Now, this was a bitter blow to me, for not one word came to me from Valerie."

"She did not, after my father's death, when she knew I was in want, as it were, with a young bride, offer to restore to me at least a part of that which was rightfully mine."

"No, she clung to it all, and, since I have returned I have made it my duty to know just how matters stand, and I find that she married Frank Fairfield, and that he was killed by being thrown over the cliff by a runaway horse, and she now possesses his fortune as well."

"Not content with Cloudlands and Cedar Hall, she has bought a half-built structure, a lovely spot, and has completed it, making a superb home of it, and she is going there to live."

"Now, my dear Zulita, I wish to get Cloudlands back again and go there to live."

"There is no reason why we should not, and there is no reason why we should say aught of our wealth; but we can say that a mutiny occurred upon my brig and we were wrecked, the mutineer crew leaving us to our fate and carrying Pierre Gerard, that vile Frenchman, with them, for I care not to let it be known that he was treacherous."

"We can go to Cloudlands and live in grand style, eclipsing all that Valerie can do, and it will be a sweet revenge to me to do so, while it

is my intention to make certain discoveries, which I would know.

"In the first place, I wish to know all about Valerie Rossmore and her antecedents, and I desire also to find out in whose interest Pierre Gerard was working when he sought to destroy us, while from certain things that I have heard, I cannot believe that Frank Fairfield is dead.

"Now, Zulita, shall I buy Cloudlands and make of it a home fit for the queen that you are, and live so as to cause those who condemned me and sneered at you as my unknown wife, to grind their teeth in envy, or shall we seek a home elsewhere and give up the pleasure of the revenge I have in contemplation?

"I leave it for you to decide, Zulita."

"I wish to do as you have said, Kennon, for our fortune is enormous, and I am revengeful, too, especially toward this woman Valerie.

"Let us go to Cloudlands!"

Such was the reply of Zulita, and a few weeks after Cloudlands was purchased, as has been seen, by a special agent of Dunbar Kennon.

It was taken just as it was, for Dunbar Kennon wished it as it had been; but there was added to it much that was beautiful and luxurious, without regard to cost, and servants were engaged by the score.

The gardens were enlarged and filled with the rarest flowers, the woodland was turned into a grand park, the stables were filled with the finest blooded horses, and the neighbors soon came to believe that Dunbar Kennon had married a princess with untold riches, for how else had he secured a wealth that seemed fabulous.

Walking out with Zulita that day they had seen Valerie halt at the gate and speak to the porter, and when they had appeared they had observed the effect upon her when she beheld them.

Dunbar Kennon had smiled, and a bitter smile it was; but Zulita's face did not change, while she said:

"She is certainly very beautiful, Kennon; but how white she turned."

"Yes, she did; and I thought she was going to faint."

"I am glad that she did not; but, Zulita, she is not half so beautiful in my eyes as you are, and somehow I wonder now how I could ever have believed that I loved her.

"I verily believe that I was under a spell."

"It may be, Kennon, for such things are possible, as I have the same feeling about Mazula."

"Don't speak of him, for I see you shudder."

"Here you are safe, Zulita."

"Yes, here I am safe, and you are safe, for he believes that we are dead and can never find us at Cloudlands."

"No, so let us bury him forever out of our memories, and forget, Zulita, that you were ever the Queen of the Island Rovers."

"I will," and as she spoke a stylish carriage dashed by their own, for they were out driving together.

In it was seated a man of striking presence, with strange black eyes, long white hair and mustache, and a most distinguished appearance.

"That is the new master of Cedar Hall, sir," said Darrow, the Cloudlands coachman, looking back and addressing Dunbar Kennon.

"Indeed! he is a splendid-looking man."

"Somehow I believe I have seen him before, Kennon," said Zulita thoughtfully, as the carriage turned into the massive gateway leading into Cloudlands.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE SEA SPIDER FORMS A PLOT.

The announcement of Pierre Gerard to the Sea Spider, that he had seen Dunbar Kennon, Zulita and Paul in New Orleans, was certainly a most startling surprise to him.

At first he was inclined to disbelieve it; but two of the seamen, who had gone in the lugger with Pierre Gerard, told how they too had seen the American officer and recognized Queen Zulita, while they hastened to prevent her recognizing them.

With this affirmation of Pierre Gerard's story, Mazula was compelled to believe that it was true.

But then the superstition in his nature was aroused in him, and he began to fear that there was something unnatural about it all.

He had followed the brig to the old island retreat of his people, and finding that the fugitives had escaped him again, he had given chase, and had certainly recognized upon the sloop not only Zulita, but also Dunbar Kennon and Paul.

He had drawn nearer them, in the calm, by towing, had seen the tornado sweep down upon the little craft, which he had afterward found capsized, with the skiff still clinging to her.

In sinking, the vessel had nearly dragged him down with it, and but for Pierre Gerard, would have done so.

That those on board could have escaped he saw not how.

Had the skiff been missing he would have had a solution of the mystery, though he could not have believed so frail a craft could have outlived that tempest.

But the skiff was not missing, and how those

on the sloop had escaped was beyond his power to find out.

He knew that he could not be mistaken in the sloop, the skiff and the people on board.

And yet he could not doubt what Pierre Gerard told him and the two Island Rovers affirmed.

It was a most mysterious affair, and it worried the Sea Spider.

But, trusting that the mystery could be explained in time, and wishing to find the fugitives, he at once decided to place confidence in Pierre Gerard and start him upon their track.

But Mazula was a cunning fellow, and he thought it best to send another with him, and so a seaman, one whom he knew well he could trust, was to go with the Frenchman.

Of course this seaman was to be under the orders of Pierre Gerard, but at the same time the Frenchman was to be kept under the eye of the Island Rover, and what that meant can well be imagined by the reader.

So Pierre Gerard and Bunco, the Island Rover, were landed upon a point on the Gulf Coast, from whence they could make their way to New Orleans, and the Sea Spider sailed for his retreat, after having appointed a rendezvous on the coast near New York with the two men, six weeks later, for it was felt certain that Dunbar Kennon would return to the North.

Did he not do so, but remain in New Orleans, or go to some other port, then Pierre Gerard was to at once charter a craft and sail for the Rover's Island to inform the chief, leaving a detective on the track of the American.

Such was the arrangement of Pierre Gerard and the Sea Spider, and the former, with the Rover, Bunco, landed on the coast and made their way to New Orleans.

To his delight Pierre Gerard found that Dunbar Kennon was still in the city, but was to sail that day.

Had this but been known sooner, it would have been easy for the Sea Spider to have captured the packet-ship and taken the fugitives prisoner.

As it was, however, Pierre Gerard and Bunco, in a thorough disguise as old men, took sail upon the same vessel.

Upon reaching New York Dunbar Kennon was dogged to his quarters, and all that he did was known to the two spies, who, first in one disguise, and then another, kept him constantly under their eyes.

That Dunbar Kennon had purchased Cloudlands, through an agent, they did not know; but when he moved there, they were aware that something of importance had happened, and at once went to the rendezvous appointed with the Sea Spider, for the time to meet him had arrived.

Feeling assured that Dunbar Kennon was safely housed for the present, they took a small sail-boat and started for the spot on the Jersey Coast where they were to meet the Sea Spider.

Running into the inlet by night, for they cared not to attract attention, they found the schooner had arrived, and she was at anchor in a secluded cove some three miles from the coast, where she was securely hidden.

A challenge from the schooner, as the little boat came in sight, found the officer of the watch on the alert, and a moment after Pierre Gerard was in the cabin, where he had received a warm welcome from Mazula.

"You are punctual, señor; but what news have you?"

"Captain Kennon has purchased his old home of Cloudlands, paying a large sum in cash for it, and is living there now, my King."

"Good! this is indeed joyful news."

"He has fitted the place up like a palace, gotten horses, carriages and servants without number, and lives like a prince."

"His wife is a queen, and it is as I supposed: they got her treasure when they went to the island."

"But what else have you to report, señor?"

Pierre Gerard told all that he knew of the movements of Dunbar Kennon, and made known the fact that his old master, Frank Fairfield, had been killed, after having married Valerie Rossmore, whom Kennon had given up for Zulita, and that the latter, an immensely rich widow, was building for herself a superb house, though why, he did not know, as she still had Cedar Hall.

After some moments of silent thought, Mazula said:

"Señor Gerard, you have done well, and I frankly admit now that I have perfect faith in you, so I wish you to aid me in a plot I have on hand, one that has come to me as I have heard your story."

"I am at your service wholly, my King."

"Serve me as I wish and I will enrich you."

"Now hear my plot, and aid me by suggestions all you can," and for several hours the two sat there in the cabin of the schooner, plotting some deep game which should be played to the bitter end to win, and winning meant the destruction of Dunbar Kennon, Zulita, and Paul.

Having arranged their plot, the Sea Spider ordered the men on board and sail set, and by dawn the beautiful schooner was well out to

sea, while the little boat in which Pierre Gerard and the seaman had run down to the rendezvous on the Jersey Coast was returning to New York with several more persons in her than she had sailed from the city with.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE FIRST CALL.

THERE was great excitement in the neighborhood surrounding the three elegant homes of Cloudlands, Cedar Hall and The Retreat, for the new arrivals had completely turned the heads of the people.

After seeing that Cloudlands had been turned into a palace, and Cedar Hall was being made equally as palatial, the good people were seized with a desire to shake the rust and dust from their houses, dig out the weeds from the walks and mend the fences.

Crops had been excellent, trade on the river was most active, business in the city was good and money plenty, so the dwellers about Cloudlands for leagues began to mend the roads, beautify their houses and grounds, and refurbish their mansions.

The sound of the saw and the hammer was heard in the land, the smell of paint mingled with the perfume of flowers, and carriages fresh out of the shops, with new horses and coachmen in livery, rolled proudly along the country roads.

And all this was set going, it was said, by a woman.

Valerie Rossmore having built a new home and sold her old ones, had completely upset the neighborhood, while there having moved to Cloudlands its old master, said to be enormously rich, and to Cedar Hall a Mexican millionaire, and a bachelor, the people around were wild with delight.

The young gentlemen all spruced up to win favor in the eyes of the pretty and rich "Widow Valerie," as she was called, while designing mammas bought rich toilets for their marriageable daughters in which they could catch the Mexican, Don Monte Banco.

Associating Banco with Bunt, and Monte with the immortalized Monte Cristo, the good people of imaginative minds were not long in dubbing the Mexican millionaire a Monte Cristo.

Of course all this improvement in the neighborhood meant that those who improved hoped to be in the charmed circle of society into which the Mexican must enter.

Nor was Dunbar Kennon forgotten, for he had even been admired and liked by many, and coming back *a la Monte Cristo*, with a fabulous fortune at his command and a mysterious and beautiful wife, he was also to be set up as an idol.

His clever way of purchasing his old home was the talk of all, and folks hoped to see how the Widow Valerie and Dunbar Kennon would get along together.

There was one peculiarity about Don Monte Banco, and that was that his servants were all foreigners, Mexicans, like himself, it was said, and he had as secretary a priest in robes and wearing a pair of gold spectacles which set him off with a literary look.

There was too, it was said, not a female servant in the Monte Banco mansion, and yet all went on like clockwork.

Cloudlands, the people said, had been made a perfect palace of, and all were anxious for a suitable time to pass, after the arrival of the new-comers, so they could call and pay their respects, and thus set the ball rolling for enjoyment.

They were willing to delay, too, as they wished to get their own homes in order in which to welcome a return visit from the new-comers.

Finding that Dunbar Kennon had added in every way to Cloudlands to make it more beautiful and luxurious as a home, Valerie also spent additional sums in beautifying The Retreat, and thus the simulation had almost turned the heads of the good people and the improvement craze went on to a wonderful extent, even Skipper Douglass spending a season's earnings in fitting up River Vale Farm.

Thus a month passed away and the gentry began to drop in to pay their respects to Don Monte at Cedar Hall, while some with their wives and daughters drove over to Cloudlands to call upon Dunbar Kennon and his beautiful wife.

With cold politeness they were received at Cloudlands, while Don Monte gave them cordial welcome.

The first caller at Cloudlands was Valerie Rossmore.

She had smothered her pride and determined to go to see the man she loved yet with all her soul, and the wife whom he had given her up for.

She drove over in her finest carriage, with coachman and footman in livery, and sweeping up the broad steps of the home which had been her own, she sent in her name.

She was pale, but calm, and her eyes took in the added beauties of the grand parlors since she had been their mistress.

She saw a display of magnificence on all sides which surprised her, and she wondered at the vast wealth that must have fallen to Dunbar

Kennon, for with all of her inheritance she could not have bought the half that she saw about her in the way of rare paintings and other things of exquisite beauty.

Soon there were heard a rustle of silk on the stairs and a firm step.

She knew that they came together—Dunbar Kennon and his wife.

She arose as they entered and forced herself to be calm.

How would they receive her?

Would it be with upbraiding because she held Dunbar Kennon's fortune?

Had she not also a cause for upbraiding, in that she had been cast aside for Zulita?

Were not matters about equal, honors easy between them?

Such thoughts flashed through her mind.

Then Dunbar Kennon held her hand and said in a kindly tone:

"Cousin Valerie, I am glad to see you."

"You have met my wife, Zulita?"

She had met her, and so stepped forward and held her red lips for a kiss.

It was given and the meeting was over.

"How beautiful you have made your home," she said after a few commonplace remarks.

"I am glad you like it, Cousin Valerie, and we will have a chance to admire yours when we call," Dunbar Kennon said pleasantly.

They would call then?

This was a triumph for her.

"Have you seen the purchaser of Cedar Hall, Don Monte Banco, Cousin Dunbar?" she asked.

"Only met him while out riding; but as the older resident here I shall have to call soon, and will."

"So far we have been so busy that only now are we ready to receive our friends, and you must see us often."

"May I?"

"It is so kind of you, Cousin Dunbar; but can I sometimes bring a friend, a lovely girl whom you have met, Di Douglass, for I have taken a wonderful fancy to her?"

"Certainly, for any friend of yours is welcome," said Zulita in her sweet way.

"And how glad I am that you escaped death at sea, for we mourned you both as dead, and Monsieur Gerard, the swordmaster, who was with you."

"Yes, we had a narrow escape; but we never care to speak of it, so greatly did we suffer."

And soon after Valerie took her leave, with not a word as to his clever purchase of his home, nor of his inheritance which she held; but then she felt that she had triumphed, and as she drove home she said to herself in a low, determined tone:

"He loves me yet, and she is jealous of me."

"If she were dead, I could win him yet."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE RIVAL MONTE CRISTOS.

THE "Widow Valerie" having "broken the ice," so to speak, callers rushed in upon Dunbar Kennon and his wife, and the entire force of country gentlemen dropped in to welcome Don Monte Banco into their midst.

To those who touched on the past of Dunbar Kennon, it was plainly shown by him that he would not gratify any curiosity, and wished that the bygone should be utterly ignored, and in fact meant that it should be.

As to who Zulita was, or anything about her antecedents, this, too, was a subject beyond finding out.

She spoke English with an accent, looked Spanish and yet conversed in French as fluently as in Spanish, while it was hinted that she was a Mexican.

Putting this and that together some people began to connect the coming of Don Monte with Zulita.

He was a Mexican, he was immensely rich, and so was she, and he had come to Cedar Hall soon after she had gone to Cloudlands to live.

Were they acquainted with each other?

Was he an old lover dogging her footsteps?

If so, a duel must follow, they knew, between Dunbar Kennon and the Don.

If Frank Fairfield was only alive, matters would be much livelier, the gossips well knew.

The neighborhood were surprised at the fact that Dunbar Kennon had shown no ill-will toward Valerie, who had his fortune.

But she was certainly received well at Cloudlands, as was also her friend, Di Douglass, who, though but a poor skipper's daughter, was now an acknowledged belle in society, and her beauty and refinement caused her to know her power very soon, and to keep men at her feet.

When it was hinted by the sporting gentry to Don Monte that Dunbar Kennon had purchased him a kennel of splendid hounds, the Don at once said that he thought two packs in the county were none too many. The result was that he got for himself a pack and had almost sumptuous quarters built for them.

"I hear that Captain Kennon is having a fine yacht built, and will enlarge his boat-house on the river and add a number of boats," said a young gentleman who was visiting the Don.

"Indeed! I am glad you spoke of it, for I above all things am fond of sailing, and shall at once purchase or build a yacht," said Don

Monte, and this was repeated about the country to the great delight of the gossips of both sexes.

At last Dunbar Kennon made up his mind to call upon the new master of Cedar Hall.

Twice he had met him, once driving, once riding horseback, and each time his face seemed to come back to him as one he had met in the past.

In vain did he try to place him, but could not, and so came to the conclusion that it had been when his vessel was lying in some Mexican port.

He drove over to Cedar Hall in his carriage in grand style, and was ushered in by a servant in Mexican livery, who spoke English with an accent.

Don Monte was in the gardens, but would soon be in, while the Señor Padre Morellez would welcome the señor until the coming of his master.

So said the servant, and he ushered Dunbar Kennon into the superbly-furnished parlors.

All about him he saw a scene of regal magnificence, and he could not but muse aloud:

"The parlors at Cloudlands are not more elegant.

"His wealth must be enormous; but who is he?"

"Señor Captain Kennon, I greet you with my heart in my hand."

Dunbar Kennon had heard no one enter, so he slightly started.

Turning, he beheld a man in the garb of a priest.

A man of striking appearance, with pale, clean-shaven face, large gold spectacles and hair cut like a monk's.

"Señor Morellez, I believe!" said Dunbar Kennon, rather pleased with the soft-toned voice of the priest.

"Yes, Señor Captain, Padre Morellez, the private secretary of Don Monte Banco, who will soon be with you.

"Be seated, please."

Dunbar Kennon had the same feeling in regard to the padre that he had had about Don Monte Banco.

"I have somewhere met this padre before," he muttered, as he took a seat.

"Señor Captain, your face is strangely familiar to me; do you recall where we have met before?" asked the padre, in his soft tones.

"I was about to ask you the same question, Señor Morellez."

"I have lived of late at Vera Cruz, as chaplain there, until my failing health caused me to accept the kind offer of my friend, Don Monte, and come here with him as his secretary."

"And the Don is from Vera Cruz?"

"No, from the interior of Mexico, señor, where he has large mining interests; but he is here."

They both arose as Don Monte entered.

Dunbar Kennon saw a man of his own height, broad-shouldered and of powerful build, his elegant form being set off by the superb costume he wore as a caballero.

His hair was snow-white, as was also his long, drooping mustache, the former falling in waving masses upon his shoulders.

His manners were courtly, his movements slow but graceful, indolent rather, and his English had a decided accent.

But his voice was strangely low and as rich toned as was that of the padre.

"I have met this man before—but where?"

This flashed across the brain of Dunbar Kennon as he stepped forward to meet the Don, who gave him a cordial greeting, when Padre Morellez said in his dulcet tones:

"Don Monte, this is the Señor Kennon, of Cloudlands, who has come to visit you and bid you welcome in America."

"I bid the Señor Kennon warmest greeting to Cedar Hall."

"We shall be friends," and the two men grasped hands; but from some reason Dunbar Kennon almost shuddered at the touch, for the hand of the Mexican was as cold as ice.

The Rival Monte Cristos had met.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AN UNLOOKED-FOR VISITOR.

THE round of festivities that were had in the neighborhood surrounding the Rival Monte Cristos, as I may call Don Monte Banco and Dunbar Kennon, gladdened the hearts of those who attended.

If one of the gentry gave an entertainment, the Widow Valerie was sure to eclipse it by one at The Retreat, and then Don Monte would follow suit, and his effort would leave nothing to be desired.

But Dunbar Kennon would then throw Cloudlands open for a grand ball, and people would be forced to admit that the affair was a little beyond the Cedar Hall entertainment in grandeur and luxury.

So it went on, with hunts through the country, when the gentry followed first the kennel of the Don, and then the Cloudlands hounds.

Next would follow a cruise up the river in the beautiful yachts which Dunbar Kennon and the Don had purchased, and in everything the two men seemed to wish to outvie each other.

They certainly were rivals, and yet not unfriendly ones, for they were wont often to drive the one with the other, and yet somehow the wiseheads seemed to feel that there was some mystery at the bottom of the whole affair.

The gossips were busy also in predicting that the Don would yet marry the Widow Valerie, for certainly he had become most devoted to her.

So matters stood when one afternoon, while her husband was absent in the city, called away by business, Zulita was seated in her rooms reading.

She had been happy at Cloudlands, and was hoping that she would never again see or hear of an Island Rover.

Feeling secure in the thought that Mazula believed Dunbar Kennon and herself to have been lost at sea, she did not dread that she would be traced there to Cloudlands.

Yet she knew her people so well, their bloodhound nature never to desert a trail, that had she not felt that they believed her dead, she would have been in constant fear of being tracked to her home.

Almost all of her old superstitions had gone from her in her new life, and she was hoping for the time when she would no longer have a pang of fear, or regret.

She loved Dunbar Kennon more and more each day, and her whole life was wrapped up in him.

She enjoyed his living the life of luxury he did, for she could feel that he was having a sweet revenge upon those who had not given him a helping hand or kind word, when he was disowned by his father and in need.

Valerie she had almost learned to love, and yet there was something about her she could not understand, while Di Douglass she felt drawn toward in a most kindly way.

As for the Don, she had not fathomed him.

He had dined at Cloudlands, and his soft voice and courtly manners had been very fascinating; but still she could not bring herself to like him.

She had gone with her husband to dine at Cedar Hall, and there too he had been most winning, while his secretary, Padre Morellez, was also a man of attractive manners.

Still she dreaded the priest and cared not to be often in the presence of the Don, while over her had come the same feeling that had been in Dunbar Kennon's mind, that she had met both men before.

But when?

That was what she could not find out.

When the two, with Valerie, had dined at Cloudlands, the feeling of distrust seemed to pervade Zulita's whole nature the more, and one day she thought aloud before her husband, and said:

"I feel afraid of the three of them."

"You refer to the Don, Padre Morellez and Valerie!" said Dunbar Kennon with a smile.

She started, for she had unconsciously spoken her thoughts.

"Yes, I spoke of them, but I did not intend you to hear me, Kennon."

"I was thinking of them too, and they impress me as they do you."

"But we must not show what we feel, little wife."

And so as she sat in her room this day, while her husband was absent in New York, Zulita was hoping that no more shadows would cross their lives and the future would be all bright and hopeful.

She knew that Dunbar Kennon had invested the money the treasure had brought, in a safe manner, and that it was bringing in an enormous income, far beyond their expenditures even with their luxurious living, and she was happy that she had not been a penniless bride to him.

Suddenly upon the carriage drive was heard the roll of wheels.

"Some visitors; but I will excuse myself, for I am not in a mood to see any one to-day," she mused.

Then the servant entered and told her that a gentleman had called to see her.

"Who is he, Mark?"

"I do not know, my lady."

"Gave he no name?"

"No, my lady."

"Have you never seen him before?"

"No, my lady; but he said he was anxious to see you."

"Tell him that my husband is absent, and ask him to excuse me."

The servant disappeared but soon returned with a request that Mrs. Kennon would grant him an interview as it was important to see her in the absence of her husband.

"I will be down in a few moments," was the answer, and looking very beautiful Zulita swept into the parlor a few minutes after.

There was a shaded light in the parlors, and coming from the bright hall, Zulita could at first hardly distinguish more than the form of a man advancing toward her.

"Who is it that I am to greet, sir?" said Zulita, as the visitor uttered no word.

"I am Luka, my Queen, and I throw about you the red noose!"

As the speaker uttered the words he threw over the head of Zulita a coil of red rope, while she, uttering no cry, sunk at his feet in a deep swoon.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE RED COIL.

WHEN Luka, the Island Rover, saw Zulita sink at his feet, he seemed fully equal to the occasion.

He was well dressed, and though his dark face and black hair and eyes indicated foreign birth, he yet had the appearance of a gentleman and spoke English well.

Stepping to the door of the parlor he glanced out into the broad hallway.

No one was in sight, and he returned to the prostrate, silent form upon the floor.

Raising Zulita in his arms he bore her to a divan in the back parlor, near a window, and taking from his pocket a small vial he moistened his handkerchief with its contents and bathed the face of the unconscious woman.

"More beautiful than ever," he muttered, as he gazed down upon the upturned face, lying like unto death before him.

Placing his fingers upon her pulse he felt of its throbbing, and smiled.

Soon the breast heaved rapidly, the eyes opened, and Zulita sprung to her feet.

Sae was very white-faced, for she seemed to know all and recognize the situation at once.

About her neck was a coil of what appeared to be a silken rope, and it had a coil in one end and a dagger with jeweled hilt fastened to the other.

The coil was of bright scarlet, and, but for its ominous look, would have been very beautiful, for it was exquisitely woven.

"You have found me?" and the voice of Zulita was hoarse with passion.

"Yes, my Queen."

"How did you find me here?"

"My King tracked you, my Queen."

"Mazula!"

"Yes, my Queen."

"Where is he?"

"At sea on his cruiser."

"What would you with me?"

"The red coil is about your neck, my Queen."

She shuddered, for she knew the awful import of his words.

"It means that I must go with you?"

"Yes, my Queen."

"I have the choice of death by my own hand, or of going with you, according to the meaning of this red coil and the dagger at the end!"

"It is hoped that you will return to your people, my Queen, and not rashly end your own life."

"Why should I not die now?"

"Our King, Mazula, may be merciful, my Queen."

"He knows no mercy."

"To you, my Queen."

"Why should I ask mercy of him?"

"It is for him to grant, my Queen."

"Oh! why could you not let me rest here in peace?"

"Our oaths must be kept, my Queen, and those who break their vows have to be tracked to the end."

"But I am not one of you, for I joy not in robbery and death."

"You are our Queen."

"I was, but I am not now."

"Only your death can break the claim, my Queen, and you are one of us until then."

"Be content with Mazula as your King."

"He is a true man, my Queen, a noble Island Rover, and has done much to enrich our people."

"But they demand your return. I was sent to take you back, and you are to be left to the mercy of King Mazula."

"The mercy of a tiger; but, Luka, who knows that you have found me here?"

"No one, my Queen."

"Your way, give me a few days, one week, then come back and say that I have fled, and I will enrich you."

He looked beautiful in her pleading.

But the Island Rover shook his head.

"You will not, good Luka, do this for me, and when you can enrich yourself?"

"My Queen, I have ever loved you, and were I to know now that you would fly with me alone, then only could I be tempted."

"Base dog of an Island Rover, you are even unworthy the robber people you call your own."

He flinched under her scorn and anger, and, wishing to palliate his words, said, quickly:

"You misunderstand me, my Queen, for what I said was to prove to you that I could only be tempted through my love of you."

Zulita was silent a moment and then said:

"Have you orders to bring me alone?"

"No, my Queen, there are others on the red list."

"I understand you, Luka, and I would say that I will go with you now, if you will not attempt to take those others, my husband and his slave."

"If I refuse?"

"I will call for help and my servants will

seize you, and pirates are hanged in this country."

He paled at her words, but replied: "I do not come alone, my Queen, for there are those near to protect me and a fleet craft awaits me in the river."

"Will you go?"

"Do you grant my request regarding the others?"

"Yes, my Queen."

"I will go."

"I thought that you dared not disobey, after the red coil had been thrown about you, for, as you know, my Queen, for one to refuse to return after it has been placed about his or her neck, means death by fire."

"I know, and I obey."

"Await me here ten minutes."

"But, my Queen, may I trust you?"

"I am your Queen, Señor Luka, so do not insult me."

"I shall return."

He bowed, and she swept from the room.

He had not long to wait, and yet it seemed an age to him, for well he knew his danger.

He had timed his visit well, for he knew of the absence of Dunbar Kennon, and yet, in spite of his boast, there was no one near to aid him in case he needed assistance.

He had trusted in the fact that Zulita was still an Island Rover and knew well the power of the Red Coil, which was sent to place about the necks of those who left the League.

If they disobeyed after its noose was about their necks, then they would be put to death by fire when taken back to the island.

Soon Zulita came back, and she was dressed in a traveling-suit, while in her hand she carried a small carpet-bag.

"I am ready," she said.

She was very pale, and her eyes were blood-shot from the bitter tears she had shed.

He took up her bag and walked toward the door.

"Mark, say to my husband that a note on his dressing-table will explain my going away.

"Put that carpet-bag in the carriage, for I may be detained a day or so."

The servant in his gorgeous livery obeyed, though he wondered that his mistress should drive off with a stranger and in a vehicle from the town and not in her own carriage.

But he was hired to obey, and not think, and he bowed low and did as he was ordered.

Entering the carriage, Zulita threw herself back upon the seat and covered her face with her hands, while Luka sprung in on the front seat, after telling the driver where to go.

Out of the grand gateway rolled the vehicle, along the highway down to the river-shore.

A small boat awaited them, and lying off in the river was a trim-looking coaster.

Leaving the carriage, it was dismissed by Luka, who aided Zulita into the boat, and followed her, taking the oars himself.

Reaching the coaster they boarded and Zulita sought the little cabin and threw herself down upon the floor in a perfect abandon of grief, while the anchor was gotten up by the half-dozen seamen on board, the sail was set and the craft went flying down the Hudson on its way to the sea.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

DUNBAR KENNON MAKES A VOW.

It was after nightfall when the pretty yacht of Dunbar Kennon, and which he had named the Zulita, glided up to the Cloudlands wharf, and the master sprung ashore.

He was surprised that the carriage was not there to meet him, for Zulita had told him she would come herself.

But he did not wait, and set off at a rapid walk up to the mansion, accompanied by Paul, who was carrying the bundles of things his master had bought in the city during the day.

The Zulita was a pretty craft of some thirty tons burden, furnished in a most luxurious style, and had a master and six men in crew to man her.

She dropped off from the wharf to her anchorage, and formed a pretty picture in the gathering twilight, as Dunbar Kennon turned and glanced back upon the scene.

Reaching the mansion he was surprised not to be greeted by his wife, but supposed that she had gone off for a drive and had not returned.

Mark met him at the door and he asked quickly:

"Where is my wife, Mark?"

"She went off this afternoon, sir; but said you would find a letter on your dressing-table, telling you about her going."

"This is strange," muttered Dunbar Kennon, as he hastened up-stairs.

The lamps were already lighted in the rooms above, and bastening to the dressing-table he picked up the sealed letter addressed to him.

It appeared to have been hastily written, and breaking the seal he read:

"MY NOBLE HUSBAND:—

"The blow has fallen upon us, for Señor Luka, the Island Rover came here to-day, threw about my neck the Red Coil, of which you have heard me speak, and commanded me to go with him.

"I pleaded, offering to enrich him, but he was ob-

durant, and I consented on condition that you should not be taken, nor Paul.

"And so I go back to the Island Rover, to depend upon the mercy of Mazula, and you know what that means.

"Do not follow me, for a rescue could never be made.

"Let me be the sacrifice, and you try and be happy without me, for there are many to love you and take my place.

"I know that I dare not disobey, for I fear I am still an Island Rover.

"Pity me, and often think of your unhappy ZULITA."

Thrice Dunbar Kennon read over this letter, and each time his face grew whiter and harder.

At last he said between his shut teeth:

"She dared not disobey, and she has sacrificed herself, as she believes, to save me.

"But it shall not be.

"No, I will follow her, for I can rescue her, and I vow before the heaven that looks down upon me, to tear her from those fiends, or to avenge her as woman never yet was avenged.

"Yes, I vow it by every hope of Hereafter," and he raised his hands above his head, one of them grasping the letter which Zulita had written him.

He was calm, but livid in hue, and his lips were set over his teeth, giving him a look that few men would have cared to see.

Down the stairs he went and Paul was called, while the servants who saw him looked with amazement upon the change in his face.

"Yes, master," and Paul came into the library where his master was pacing to and fro.

"Paul, the Señor Luka, the Island Rover, has been here."

"Oh, master!"

"And the Señora Zulita has gone with him."

"My God, master! has he killed her?" cried Paul, while his eyes dilated as a wild beast's might when about to spring upon its prey.

"No, but the Señor Luka came here, threw the Red Coil around my wife's neck, and she consented to go with him, if he would pledge himself not to take you or me, or trouble us in any way.

"That is about the way of it, Paul."

"Master, we must rescue her, sir, for you can do it."

"We can try; but now to find out just when she left, and how."

Mark was called, and he told how a gentleman had arrived in a carriage, and after a stay of half an hour, his mistress had gone off with the stranger, carrying with her a carpet-bag.

He had seen the carriage drive down to the shore, and then his mistress had gotten out with the stranger, and gone in a boat out to a small vessel that looked like a coaster, and the latter had at once departed down the river under full sail.

"This was at noon you say, Mark?"

"Yes, sir."

"It is now nine o'clock, and she has nine hours' start of us."

"Paul?"

"Yes, master."

"Get ready to sail in the yacht at once, and send a man down to have her skipper get up anchor and sail."

"Yes, sir."

"And prepare for a long stay, Paul."

"Yes, master."

Paul ran off to obey his orders, and Dunbar Kennon turned to Mark and said:

"Mark, when asked where I have gone, simply say that a vessel landed here to-day in my absence and my wife was kidnapped, doubtless to wring from me a large ransom for her return."

"Oh, sir!" cried Mark.

"Say that she was inveigled on the vessel under some pretense, and it sailed down the river, and that I went in pursuit in my yacht."

"Now describe the craft to me."

Mark did so as well as he could, from the notice which he had taken of the craft, and then Dunbar Kennon said:

"I will write a note to Miss Valerie Fairfield which I wish you to send over to her early in the morning."

"Yes, sir

the Hudson, just ten hours astern of the craft which had on board the beautiful Zulita, whom Dunbar Kennon had vowed to rescue, or fearfully avenge.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

UGLY RUMORS.

THERE was consternation in the land when the tidings spread from home to home that Zulita, the lovely wife of Dunbar Kennon, had been kidnapped from her home.

Ill tidings fly fast, and before noon of the day after the kidnapping, it was known for half a score of miles in every direction from Cloudlands.

It was at first said that a pirate vessel had run up the river, landed a force and sacked the mansion, bearing off Zulita.

Then it was said that an old lover had come and carried her off by force.

The rumor then went abroad that the beautiful mistress of Cloudlands had been willing to be kidnapped, and had run off, in the absence of her husband, with an old lover.

Inquiry was at once made for Don Monte Banco, and many seemed to feel disappointed that he was still at Cedar Hall, for somehow the gossips had felt that in some mysterious way Zulita had been the magnet which had drawn him to that neighborhood.

He was a Mexican, and she was supposed to be from the same country, and thus they had built up their own romance about them, and many were there to say, when Zulita had disappeared:

"I told you so!"

The note left by Dunbar Kennon for Valerie explained matters somewhat, and yet there were many who shook their heads, for they wanted it otherwise.

Upon hearing the news, Don Monte Banco had sprung into his carriage and driven over to Cloudlands.

He found quite a number of people already there, and Mark, who alone knew anything, was quite a hero and had to repeat his story over and over again.

When he told how Zulita had seemed to go willingly with the stranger, it seemed proof positive that it was not a case of kidnapping.

She had left a note for her husband, Mark said, and this seemed strange.

She had carried some little baggage, too, and this was made to look mountainous in proof that she had willingly run off.

Then the stranger was a foreigner, looked like a Mexican, was a gentleman, handsome, and had been very liberal to Mark, giving him an *onza* in gold.

Don Monte heard all that Mark had to say, and that Dunbar Kennon had written Valerie a note.

So over to Cedar Hall he told his driver to go with all haste.

Valerie had been at breakfast when she had received the note, and she sprung to her feet with a cry when she read its contents.

Her face flushed, then paled, and one who understood human nature—or rather woman nature—for the two natures of man and woman are as different as the zones—would have said that the expression was one of triumph, rather than regret.

"She has gone—what next?" came from between her even white teeth.

Then Valerie did what she should do, sent a note to Lawyer Lockwood, and upon his arrival placed Dunbar Kennon's letter in his hands.

The lawyer was amazed, but he said:

"Kennon will rescue her, or he will take a fearful revenge, for I know him well."

"You think he can find her?"

"I hope so, and if man can be will; but in the mean time if they have taken Mrs. Kennon for ransom, I will hold myself ready to pay the sum demanded."

"It may be too great a sum," ventured Valerie.

"Oh, no, nothing could be too great for her release."

"But they might ask beyond your power to pay?"

"They could not, for Kennon can pay any sum."

"Is he then so very rich?" indifferently asked the Widow Valerie.

"Oh, yes, he is worth millions."

"Well, as he got it from his wife, it is but just that he should be willing to give generously for her release."

"I think you are mistaken, madam, about Captain Kennon getting his money from his wife, for she is a Mexican, I believe, and not a dollar has come from that country, while she certainly has no voice in the matter, as I know."

"She may be rich, but Captain Kennon is also, for he controls his fortune."

Valerie seemed to meditate at this, and soon after the lawyer departed, again regretting the sad affair, and saying that he would do all in his power to gain information of the kidnappers.

Soon after Don Monte was announced and Valerie received him as she was, in a beautiful tinted breakfast robe.

The Don could not but admit that she was

very beautiful, and the Padre Morellez, who accompanied him, seemed to think the same, for he kept his eyes upon her as though fascinated.

"This is sad news, Don Monte," and the tears came into the lovely eyes of Valerie.

"Sad, indeed, señora, and learning from the butler of Cloudlands that you had had a letter from the Señor Kennon, I came over to know what you could tell me."

"Here is his letter to me."

The Don read it, and then said, hastily:

"My dear Señora Fairfield, I feel so deeply for my friend Señor Kennon, that I shall at once start in my yacht in search of the kidnappers and to aid in the rescue of sweet Señora Zulita, if it is possible for me to do so."

"It certainly is kind of you, Don Monte, and may success crown your efforts."

And Valerie grasped the hand of the Don in farewell, while she mused after his departure:

"Well, if I do not win Dunbar Kennon, should his wife fail to return, then the Don will do, for he is no ordinary man, and, in spite of his snow-white hair and mustache, I do not believe he is over thirty-five at the furthest."

"But the face of that priest troubles me."

"Where have I seen him before?"

"He eyes me in a manner that is remarkable too—Oh, Di! I am so glad you have come, for there is much to tell you."

And Valerie turned to Di Douglass, who just then entered, her face showing that she too had heard the sad news.

"I rode over, Valerie, to learn what truth there is in all this story about the kidnapping of Mrs. Kennon."

"Sit down, and you shall hear all as I know it; but I fear me, Di, that it is not a case of kidnapping altogether."

"What can you mean?"

"That Zulita had a lover before she met Dunbar Kennon, and has gone back to the old love, allowing it to seem like a kidnapping affair."

"Oh, Valerie! I cannot believe it of that lovely woman."

"I can," was the cold response.

"The packet has just come up the river, and when brother Saul told us what had happened, father said that there was a strange craft passed him yesterday running down the river under full sail and her crew looked to be foreigners, and last night he met Captain Kennon's yacht under crowds of canvas rushing toward the city and the captain hailed him and asked him about just such a vessel as he had before seen; but he had no more time than to tell him he had seen the vessel when the Zulita went by like the wind."

"He will never catch that craft, Di."

"Don't say so, Valerie, for I always hope for the best."

"I know it, for I feel that whoever has taken Zulita away from Cloudlands knows where to carry her where she cannot be found."

And the look upon the Widow Valerie's face as she spoke indicated that she certainly wished such to be the case.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

AGAIN AMONG HER PEOPLE.

THE vessel in which Zulita had been taken from her home had the appearance of being a coaster, but she had been prepared to resemble that class of craft as much as possible, and few would have believed her to be otherwise.

But a thorough seaman, attentively regarding the vessel would have decided that there were remarkably good points about her which few coasters had.

Her hull, though made to appear rough-looking and clumsy by various devices, was as trim as a yacht, the bows as sharp as a knife, and a look about it that showed both sea-going qualities of a high order and speed.

Her sails were worn and patched; but somehow she spread a very large canvas to the breeze. There were not half-a-dozen men visible upon her decks; but if the forward hatch had been removed two-score dark-faced men could have been found below, with caddies to retreat into at a warning sound from on deck.

Then there were heavy guns stowed down below beneath the flooring of the lower deck, and yet an inspecting officer, looking for suspicious circumstances connected with the little vessel, might have gone from cabin to forecastle and made no discovery that would cause him to hold her.

Past the city of New York went the craft, flying along at a speed that surprised the honest Hudson River skippers, and out into the sea without dropping anchor in front of the town.

Zulita had been taken to the cabin by Luka and she knew that it would be all her own.

It was not an unpleasant place, but rather comfortable, though certainly a striking contrast to her palatial rooms at Cloudlands.

One of the crew, a mere youth, came to serve her with food, and held himself at her service to do her bidding, for the Señor Luka seemed to wish to keep away from her.

He had done his duty in gaining possession of her, and her fate was now to be left with King Mazula.

Straight out to sea went the little vessel, as

though anxious to throw any pursuer off of her wake, and as she sped along new spars and larger sails were set, the old ones being removed, for they had served their purpose in giving the vessel the look of a coaster while in port.

Under her new rig the craft went along at a remarkably fast pace, and Zulita knew that there would be no chance of being overtaken in any vessel that was not possessed of phenomenal speed.

She bore her capture calmly, for capture it was, though she had gone of her own will.

She knew, or supposed that she did, that her husband would attempt her rescue.

This she deprecated, for she cared to have no harm befall her people, and yet she hoped for a rescue.

Dunbar Kennon was no man to allow her to be taken from him as she had been, and she wondered what the end of it all would be.

She knew also that her fate lay in the hands of Mazula, as he was King.

Still, until her death, she was Queen of the Island Rovers, only her act had called for punishment which the Sea Spider had it in his power to command should he have dealt it upon her.

That punishment in part lay in her own hands, for she could drive a dagger to her heart, take poison or state what should be her manner of going out of life.

This privilege was hers, and Mazula could only order it carried out.

Should he be merciful and spare her, she knew that it would mean the death of her husband, Dunbar Kennon, that the barrier to her marriage with Mazula should be removed.

Loving Dunbar Kennon, wedded to him, and wishing to see no harm befall him, while she hated Mazula, she was in a quandary as to what she could do.

If she could save her husband by any act of hers, she would, and yet she would not wish to in the end be bound to Mazula.

So it was that thoughts crowded upon her, as the little vessel sped on its way, until she felt that she would go mad.

Thus the days passed, the little cruiser, for her guns had been again hoisted upon deck, keeping up her swift flight southward.

One afternoon she began to shorten sail, and Zulita, who was on deck, wondered at the cause.

Here and there an island had been sighted, and now as darkness was approaching, she saw ahead a number of little isles, with rocks and reefs.

She did not doubt but that they were nearing the new retreat of the Island Rovers.

"We have to lay to all night, my Queen, as we dare not attempt the run in by night," said Luka, approaching her.

"You know best, señor."

"I hope, my Queen, that you have not had an unhappy voyage."

"How could it be otherwise, señor, torn from one I love."

"Do you not love your people also, my Queen?"

"Had I loved them, Luka, more than I did the one I fled with, I should have remained."

"But I did love them, there are many of them very dear to me, and I was happy among them until I met one who taught me that I was but a fictitious queen, a ruler of a band of outlaws, with no flag, no country, and who enriched themselves by bloodshed alone."

"I have had my eyes opened; but, as an Island Rover once, I submit to the inevitable now and shall accept the punishment put upon me."

"I strongly suspect, my Queen, that the King Mazula loves you so devotedly that he will wish to make you his wife."

"I am a wife now, Luka."

"True, but your husband is not an Island Rover."

"Silence! he is my husband, he whom he may, and death alone can separate us."

"Death may, my Queen," was the significant response.

"You mean his death?"

"Yes, my Queen, for then you will be free to wed King Mazula."

"It shall not be his death, but mine, for I shall accept no mercy at the hands of Mazula, but, on the contrary, shall demand my right to die by my own hand."

"You have but brought me back to see me die, Luka, and the sooner the better," and Zulita turned away, as though to end the conversation.

All night the vessel lay to, but at the first peep of dawn got under way and entered the channel leading to the retreat, and in a few hours after Zulita was again among the Island Rovers.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A QUEEN'S SENTENCE.

WHEN the little Island Rover vessel was sighted from the island, there was considerable excitement among the strange people who made up this League of Sea Spiders, as they were

called by many honest mariners who feared their depredations.

All knew that the Sea Scout, as the little vessel was named, had gone in search of Zulita, their Queen, and that Luka was a man to carry out the orders given him by Mazula to the very letter.

The fact that the flag of Queen Zulita, with its spread white wings and golden eye, floated at the peak of the Sea Scout, showed that Luka had been successful in his mission and that their fugitive ruler was on board.

All loved her, or had done so, until her flight, and among the women and young girls there was felt a deep sympathy for her in that she had done as she did for love.

Her clever ruse of pretending to commit suicide was considered quite romantic, and that she had rescued her lover from death and escaped with him made her a heroine in the eyes of the younger people.

But the older ones looked grave, and the Three Wise Men, especially, looked the very acme of melancholy and righteous anger combined.

Zulita had sinned, she had broken her oath, loved one out of the Island Rovers' League, tempted the executioner, Señor Morte, to rescue the one she loved and his negro companion, had pretended to commit suicide, had bribed the Señor Harman and his crew to aid her escape and then desert the Island Rovers, had carried with her her maid, Lazuli, and, with all these sins upon her, she could expect no longer the love and confidence of her cruelly outraged people.

She could expect only to take her own life, in deserved punishment, as she had a right to do, under their laws, or throw herself upon the mercy of her devoted lover, the noble King Mazula.

So the people thought, and they were much excited as the little Sea Scout swept around the island to enter the harbor.

As the vessel ran in the heavy guns of the fort under command of the Señor Ramon fired a salute and the flag was dipped in response, each time with an answering gun from the Sea Scout.

Then the anchor was dropped, and, closely veiled, Zulita was rowed ashore.

There was not a sound heard among the people gathered to receive her as she landed.

They stood, men with uncovered heads, women and children with heads bent down, and received her in silence.

She made but one sign, and that was to raise her veil and glance a moment into the faces of her people.

Her face was pale, but the look was an honest, fearless one, for she wished to show them that she was not ashamed of what she had done.

Then, with the Señor Ramon one side and Señor Luka upon the other, she walked up the hill toward the abode prepared for her and which was in the fort.

A girl of her people was there to receive her and act as maid, and Zulita started slightly as Señor Ramon whispered:

"Dismiss the girl—say that you wish no maid."

She did so, and the cunning-faced maiden, who had been selected by the Three Wise Men as Zulita's maid, was obliged to retire.

"I wish to remain alone and in peace until the day of my doom," she said.

Then she asked:

"Where is King Mazula?"

"Absent, my Queen, upon a cruise," responded Señor Ramon.

"Leave me to myself."

The Señors Ramon and Luka obeyed, and as they walked away they bent their steps toward the home of the former, which was not far distant.

During the absence of Luka, and while King Mazula was away, the Señor Ramon was acting chief.

To Luka he gave an account of his stewardship, and in turn was told how the capture of Queen Zulita was made.

"Will not her husband follow her?"

"He may, but it will simply be his death."

"He may come with an American fleet to aid him."

"He cannot reach the island, Señor Ramon."

"In calm weather and in boats, yes, and his vessels can prevent aid from our cruisers."

"I tell you, Señor Luka, this looks bad for our people."

"It does, I confess, but it was King Mazula's wish, and he will doubtless see that the American officer does us no harm."

"It may be; but when he comes he should look the matter squarely in the face as it is."

"Yes, it must be so; but will you place a guard over the Queen Zulita until the King returns?"

"And why? for our people are not traitors, and the executioner, you remember, who aided her flight, met his fate, and that will be a warning."

"True," and so saying the Señor Luka returned to his duties as chief, and received congratulations upon all sides for the splendid service he had done in bringing the Queen Zulita

back to her people, for to invade a foreign land and secure her was, they knew full well, a most perilous undertaking.

"If King Mazula was dead, then Queen Zulita would be supreme and could pardon herself, and in that case I think I would be chosen by the Three Wise Men as King—in fact, I know I would be."

"The subject is well worth thinking over, and perhaps King Mazula might die," muttered Luka, and the reader will readily see that in spite of the fearful laws that bound the Island Rovers together, there were wheels within wheels of plot and counterplot among them.

Several days passed away and the Island Rovers kept very quiet, for it seemed as though the shadow of death was upon them.

Several cruisers came in, but no report was made of having seen the vessel of the Sea Spider, their King.

One morning, however, a sail was descried in the distance, and Señor Ramon, who was looking at it with his glass, said:

"It is the Sea Spider."

"King Mazula is returning, then?"

Señor Ramon started, for he had spoken aloud, not knowing any one was near him.

The speaker was Zulita. She had not before left her quarters since her return; but she, too, had seen the distant sail from a nook near the cabin, and her glass had told her that it was the schooner Sea Spider.

"Yes, my Queen, that is the King Mazula's new vessel," said Ramon.

"I recognize it, for I have twice before seen it."

"Indeed, my Queen?"

"Yes, when the Sea Spider came to our old Island Retreat once, and again when he was in chase of the little sloop in which my husband and myself made our escape from him."

"I have reason to remember yonder craft, Señor Ramon."

The man made no reply, but gazing at the face of the beautiful woman, saw that it was pale and haggard.

"I fear you have suffered, my Queen."

"Heaven only knows how much; but you, good Señor Ramon, have been my friend through all."

"And will be, my Queen."

"So I surmised, when you bade me dismiss that girl as my maid."

"She is a cunning minx, my Queen, and was placed as a spy over you by the Three Wise Men."

"It was well to be rid of her then; but tell me, were you not suspected in the good service you rendered us in our flight?"

The Señor Ramon looked cautiously about him.

He had begun to think that the rocks of the Island Rovers' retreat had ears.

But no one was near and he replied:

"It was of course the executioner, Señor Morte, who was suspected, my Queen, and I had orders from King Mazula to execute him—"

"Execute yourself!"

"To execute the executioner, my Queen and then to become the executioner myself."

"May I ask how you performed this wonderful deed of executing yourself, and still being alive?"

"I had a hold on one man, my Queen, whose crime would condemn him to death."

"I had spared him however, but determined to sacrifice him as the executioner, so rigged him out as the Man in Red, told him he must die, and, like all those blind fools of Rovers, he obeyed."

"Thus I saved myself to yet be able to serve you."

"I shall demand to die by own hand, Ramon."

"Make your death to be rowed out at midnight, loaded with chains and sunk into the sea by the executioner, my Queen."

"You wish this, Señor Ramon?"

"I do, unless you will accept pardon from King Mazula."

"No, I prefer death, and the sentence you suggest I shall demand," and Zulita returned to her quarters, while an hour after the forts thundered a salute to the Sea Spider upon his return to his people.

CHAPTER XL.

BY HER OWN COMMAND.

THE return of the King Mazula under other circumstances, would have been greeted with wild cheers by his people.

Since his becoming their ruler, he had sent into the general treasury, much larger sums of gold and booty, than any others had ever done.

His beautiful schooner had captured more prizes than had his whole score of little cruisers, and the Sea Spider was thus becoming the idol of his people.

But a gloom was upon them, and the young King knew why it was that the island did not ring with cheers at his return.

The Queen Zulita had returned.

So he went in silence to his land quarters, and there Luka and Ramon soon joined him, followed by the Three Wise Men, Shama, Hana, and

Japha, whose names had evidently been pirated from the Bible and contorted to suit the Island Rovers.

The faces of all were serious, but that of the Sea Spider wore a look of triumph.

"My people, we have recaptured our Queen," he said, when the Three Wise Men had taken seats.

They all bowed assent.

"Seniors, it has been a hard track that we have had to follow, gold has had to flow as free as water, and Señor Luka deserves the greatest praise for his success."

Señor Luka bowed, and the Three Wise Men gave him a smile of thanks.

"The Queen is once more in our midst, and yet I am inclined to be merciful."

All bowed, and the Sea Spider resumed:

"You all know that the Queen Zulita is still ruler; but her acts have caused her to come under the ban of death."

"She is once more among us, and, as I love her I am willing to offer her a chance for her life, that she may receive pardon and all be forgiven."

"This charge is that she consents that one of our people, the executioner, be sent from the island on a secret mission."

"He can go as the Man in Red, unknown to those who sail with him, and land at a certain point on the coast, when he is to track down the American seafar Dunbar Kennon and his slave, and put them to death."

"When he has done this, he is to return and report to me, and Queen Zulita, thus freed from her husband, is to become my wife."

"Should she accept these terms my pardon shall be bestowed upon her."

"But should she refuse, my King?" asked Luka.

"She must die."

"She has her own choice of death, my King?" said Luka.

"Yes."

"May I make a suggestion, my King?"

"Certainly, Señor Luka."

"It is that you send me, instead of the executioner, and if you will land me yourself at the point where the American seafar can be found, I will soon bring you word of his death and the death of his slave."

"Perhaps it were better so, and it shall be."

"But now, Seniors Wise Men, you are to go to the Queen Zulita and let her know my will, for I will not myself see her."

The Three Wise Men bowed and departed from the quarters of the Sea Spider.

Making their way to the abode of Zulita, they knocked at the door and begged an audience with her.

She admitted them, bowed coldly, and said:

"Be seated, seniors, and say why you have come?"

Shama, as spokesman, responded:

"My Queen, the great King of the Island Rovers has arrived."

"I saw the Sea Spider when his vessel came into the harbor."

"He has held council with us, my Queen, and with the Seniors Luka and Ramon, his chief officers."

"Well, señor?"

"He is inclined to pardon you, my Queen."

"I seek no pardon from his hands."

Shama was nonplussed, and he glanced at Hama and Japha, when the latter said:

"The King is merciful, my Queen."

"Yes, merciful, my Queen," echoed Hama.

"He is merciless; but I will not discuss the tender-heartedness of the mighty Sea Spider, but ask why you are here?"

"The King Mazula offers to pardon you, my Queen, if you will consent to remain in penance until the Señor Luka visits America and puts to death your husband and his African slave."

Zulita sprung to her feet with a fierce light in her eyes; but she controlled her emotion, and said:

"Continue, señor."

"When the Señor Luka returns and reports that he has made you a widow, for six months you will be allowed to wear sable garments and keep in exile, after which you will be fully pardoned by your King and your people, and become the bride of the great Sea Spider."

The Three Wise Men were sorry they had come on their errand when they looked upon Zulita.

Her face seemed to be aglow with fury, and her eyes fairly unnerved them with the fierce light in them.

"Go back to the great Sea Spider and say to him, Seniors Wise men, that the Queen Zulita has done no act that she is ashamed of, that she asks for no mercy from him, no pardon, but by dying by her own sweet will she wipes out any stain that her people may feel she has been tarnished with her own acts, and she will go to her death whenever it is fit that she should."

"Tell your King, also, that the Queen Zulita chooses her own way of death, and that her people may see that she does not fear to die, as many a man has been made to go out of this life, she wills that she be loaded with irons, borne out in a boat by the executioner, one

league from this island, and at night, and sunk into the depths of the sea.

"Say that this is Queen Zulita's choice of death, and she is ready to give the command to be led forth at any time, that an end may come to her misery and that the Sea Spider may find another maiden to wed and Zulita be forgotten by her people."

"Go, Señors Wise Men, for you have your answer for the Sea Spider, your King!"

They fairly slunk out of her presence, and ventured back to the quarters of their King, who was still engaged in conversation with Luka and Ramon.

"Well, señors, you saw the Queen?" he said, and his face became anxious in expression.

"Yes, my King," answered Hama, who was the spokesman, greatly to the relief of his two *confidantes*.

"How looked she?"

"As though she were ill at heart, my King."

"How did she receive you?"

"With extreme courtesy, my King."

"You told her my offer of pardon?"

"Yes, my King."

"Was she not happy to know that I was merciful to her?"

"She seemed not so, my King."

"What?"

"She seemed angered, and said that she asked not mercy of you."

"Ah!"

"Yes, my King."

"And what said she of my terms?"

"She refused them with anger, my King."

"She refused them?"

"My King, she did," and Shama appealed to Hama and Japha to prove that he told the truth.

They indorsed him with a bow.

"She will have to die, then."

"She seemed anxious, my King, to do so."

"Indeed?"

"She certainly did, my King, and more, she selected her own way of death, which is horrible."

"In what respect?"

"She selected to die, my King, by the means that we punish those whom we desire to execute."

"By a leap into the sea in irons?" asked Mazula, with amazement.

"By being loaded with irons, my King, and taken out into the sea at midnight, in a boat, with the executioner, and thus be thrown by aim into the waters."

"This is fearful," said Luka.

The Sea Spider, to the surprise of all, only smiled.

Then turning to the Señor Ramon, he said with a knowing look:

"She does not know that there has been a change, good Ramon."

"No, my King."

"She thinks that the executioner is the same."

"Ah, yes, my King; 'twould so seem," answered Ramon, calmly.

"She shall have her wish, but she will find that there has been a change, for traitors are punished by the Island Rovers," and Mazula smiled grimly, as he recalled the fact that the old executioner had been executed; or at least he supposed that he had.

So it was decided that the Queen Zulita should have her own way, selecting the manner and time of her death, and orders were given to Señor Luka to summon the executioner when he returned to his quarters, bid him go to the Queen and ask just what night she selected for her going out of existence.

Señor Ramon was surprised that King Mazula did not show more feeling in the matter.

He almost thought that the Sea Spider seemed willing to get rid of the Queen.

"Is there another woman in the case, I wonder?" he muttered, as he went toward the spot where he secretly kept the garb of the Man in Red.

He had not long to wait before he heard the tocsin call him from the quarters of Luka.

Thither he went, robed as the Man in Red, and he was given orders to go to the quarters of Queen Zulita, tell her that she had chosen her own mode of death, and to appoint the time when she would die.

The executioner started off, and Señor Luka felt a regret that he had not been able to solve the secret as to who he was.

Others of the Island Rovers did not care to know, but Señor Luka did, and he made up his mind that he would try and find out.

In fact, this ambitious young chief was cutting out for himself quite a lot of business, with the one aim to become King in the end, for he had felt that he must give up the idea of ever making Zulita his wife, for that she could, or would be saved from her doom, he saw no reason to believe.

So to the home of the doomed Queen went the Man in Red, those who saw him going shuddering as he passed them, for his mission was readily guessed at.

A knock at the door and he was bidden to enter.

Zulita received him with a quiet smile and was told his mission.

"When will it best suit your convenience, Señor Executioner?" she asked.

"Two nights from this, my Queen," replied the Man in Red.

"At midnight?"

"Yes, my Queen."

"I shall be ready."

The Man in Red bowed and departed.

By her own command the Queen Zulita had set the hour of her death.

CHAPTER XL.

INTO THE DEPTHS.

THERE was a gloom over all of the Island Rovers.

Their Queen had returned to them, but she had willed to suffer for her deeds, and was to die.

She had said how she preferred to die, and it was believed that remorse was what caused her to choose an end so fearful.

She preferred death to asking pardon for herself, and in the end becoming the wife of the Sea Spider.

Some thought that she preferred death because she thought that it would prevent her husband from being hunted down.

But Luka had hinted that Dunbar Kennon could be found at any time and would be made to suffer, as he had caused all the sorrow to come upon them through having a faithless Queen.

But there was gloom upon the Rovers, for the time was set when their Queen was to die.

Their King, the Sea Spider, was wrapped in sable robes and kept to his quarters, fasting and praying for the rest of the Queen's soul.

The people had all put on sable garments, and no word was spoken unless it was necessary.

At night no lights were allowed, and by day no one walked forth, for the pall of death must rest upon all.

The fisher-boats did not go forth upon the waters, every-day toil was neglected, and all waited for the end to come.

The doomed Queen kept in her quarters, and now and then her voice was heard chanting some sad requiem, wild and weird in its music.

The Man in Red had given out when the execution was to be, and the Rovers were to be ready to witness the last walk of the Queen to her death.

Thus the time passed until the night of the execution.

The moonlight shone brightly upon sea and island, and yet not from a human being was heard a sound.

Then the people began to assemble along the path leading to the cove.

There a boat awaited, and the Man in Red appeared and covered it with a heavy velvet cloth, leaving the ends trailing over the sides and astern.

In the stern and in the bow were then placed red and blue lanterns, which lighted up the boat with a weird glare.

Then the Man in Red placed the oars, draped with black, in their place, and stepped out upon the float leading to the shore.

The people had gathered now and gazed upon him in silence as he passed.

Up the pathway he went toward the fort, and soon he halted at the door of Queen Zulita's cottage.

He gave a knock and Zulita appeared.

She was robed in deep black, and yet her face was not veiled.

It seemed that she was anxious to look her people in the eyes to the last.

That she wished to show them that no shame rested upon her, and if they deemed that she had done wrong, her going to her death would wipe out the stain.

"I have come to lead my Queen to her death," said the Man in Red.

"I am ready," was the calm reply, and the executioner placed about her the manacles and chains.

Then the Man in Red stepped before her and slowly began the march to the shore.

The Queen followed with a step that did not falter, and a face that, though blanched, yet was not stamped with fear.

A sigh, a moan came here and there from the lips of her people, alone breaking the appalling silence.

The moon streamed down in all its silvery beauty and lighted up a strange, sad scene.

As the Queen and Man in Red left the cabin, the Three Wise Men fell in behind Zulita, walking abreast.

It was their duty to see her to the boat.

Those who asked in whispers as to where Mazula was, learned that he was in his quarters, and some said that he had sent for Señor Ramon to bear him company.

Slowly down to the shore marched the Man in Red, and behind him came the Queen, and following her the Three Wise Men.

All gazed upon the white, calm face, and pity seemed to enter every heart.

But the laws of the Island Rovers were inviolate, and no one dare beg for mercy for her.

The float was reached and the Queen Zulita

turned, and raising her manacled hands, while her chains clanked dismally, firmly from her lips came the words:

"Let my death atone."

"A last farewell to my people."

A sound like a moan ran through the assembled crowd, and the voices of children crying then broke the silence, and, with the weeping of women swelled louder and louder until it became one mighty wail of sorrow.

But Zulita did not falter, and stepped into the funeral-boat and took her seat in the stern, bowing her head upon her knees as though in prayer.

Entering the boat the executioner took his seat, seized the oars and with slow, steady stroke glided away.

Out of the harbor, past the beautiful schooner Sea Spider and other vessels at anchor there, went the boat, and from thence out upon the open waters.

The crowds moved to the hill-tops and watched the little glimmering lights, as the boat passed further and further out upon the sea.

Every eye was strained, every heart seemed to stand still, and they watched and watched until at last the boat ceased to move onward.

It lay upon the waters, rising on the swell.

The sea was calm, there was only a balmy breeze floating over the waters, and the moonlight revealed the little boat distinctly.

There, between the lanterns two forms were visible to the eager, but silent crowd of Island Rovers.

They saw a swaying to and fro, they thought, in the stillness that they could hear the death-plunge, and then the lights were seen moving, and the boat was known to be returning.

A sigh, like the wind surging through a pine forest, went up from the multitude of lookers-on.

They watched the returning boat, saw it enter the cove, and then the Man in Red leaped ashore and said aloud:

"It is over! Our Queen is no more, for her body has gone down, loaded with chains, into the depths of the sea."

Then, leaving the funeral barge, all draped as it was, the Man in Red disappeared in the crowd.

People shrunk from his path, and he went on his way into the island, to disappear no one knew where, and, discarding his scarlet costume and mask, to still remain unknown to all except his King, to still remain the Man in Red, the executioner of the Island Rovers.

The next day, as though anxious to get away from the scene of Zulita's death, the Sea Spider set sail in his beautiful vessel to again skim the ocean in his hunt for gold and booty.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE RETURN.

THE excitement following upon the kidnapping of Zulita, did not readily subside in the neighborhood of Cloudlands.

It was more than a nine-days' wonder, and about every home circle it was discussed.

It had been discovered that Dunbar Kennon had stopped for a short while in New York, and then put to sea under a cloud of canvas, heading straight down the Jersey Coast.

Some had seen the Sea Spider go out of the harbor, and had remembered her on account of her great speed, as shown, for a supposed coaster.

With this information Dunbar Kennon had gone in chase, it was said, or at least such was the rumor about Cloudlands.

Then many spoke of the kindness of Don Monte Banco in going to the aid of his American friend.

His yacht was known to be very fast, fully as fleet in fact, as was Dunbar Kennon's yacht, the Zulita, and he always kept a large crew, so that he could be of great assistance should they come up with the kidnapper craft.

Each day however seemed to increase the belief, started by the gossips, that Zulita had wished to run away from her husband.

Why had she written him a note unless she had desired to go? was asked.

Was it reasonable to suppose that her kidnappers would have allowed her to write a note to her husband?

Many did not think so.

Then in the letter left by Dunbar Kennon for Valerie, he had not referred to receiving a letter from his wife.

It certainly looked bad, and the more the gossips rolled the sweet morsel of scandal about on the tips of their tongues the sweeter it tasted, and it became like honey in many ears, to hear how the beautiful, but unknown, Mrs. Dunbar Kennon, had run away from her palatial home and devoted husband with some old lover.

Dunbar Kennon was pronounced a fool for marrying an unknown woman, particularly a Mexican, and many hoped that he would not be able to catch her, fearing that he would forgive her, and certainly she should not be tolerated in society.

So matters went on for days, and weeks.

Then people began to grow anxious.

To take the Rival Monte Cristos out of the

neighborhood was to visit upon it a bitter blow.

They had become necessary, as it were, to the happiness of the community.

Their superb homes, elegant equipages, liveried servants, fleet yachts and sumptuous dinners, could not be forgotten.

But it did seem as though something had happened to them.

Why had not Dunbar Kennon returned, if he could not find his wife?

Why had not the Don returned if he could not find Dunbar Kennon?

Such were the questions asked and no one could answer them.

Cloudlands was not closed, but was kept open, and all went on as though the master had only gone away for a day.

Then Cedar Hall had a master in Padre Morellez, who seemed to take matters quite easily in his palatial quarters.

He drove out now and then, occasionally rode on horseback, walked often in the woodlands, and went for a row or a sail upon the river, taking good care upon every occasion to always be on time at meals, whether it was breakfast, dinner or late supper, for the padre was a *bon vivant*.

Many called upon him to make inquiries, but always he had the same reply, that he had heard nothing, and it was barely possible that both yachts might have gone down, and the kidnapper, too, in the fearful storms which had followed their departure from port, for incoming vessels about that time reported the seas swept by tornadoes.

Then the padre thought that the Don might turn up; but he would not worry yet awhile.

Whether he thought that the Widow Valerie had means of getting information, which others had not, he certainly was wont to go each day to The Retreat and ask her if there were tidings of the missing one.

Then, too, he was most regular in the time of his call, always appearing just in time to be asked in to luncheon, and the Widow Valerie was noted as a fine housekeeper.

Sometimes Di Douglass was with her, and at other times the Widow Valerie was alone, and one might have said, who saw, that the Padre Morellez preferred to find the Widow Valerie alone.

And so the days went by until nearly two months had passed.

But the topic of kidnapping was not yet old, and still continued to be talked about as briskly as the day following the happening of the mysterious affair.

That the two yachts still remained away seemed to be proof positive that they had gone down in the storms which followed their sailing, and, if the Rival Monte Cristos were lost, what was to become of their fabulous fortunes was the question which began to be the theme of conversation.

Upon this point, as regarded the fortune of Don Monte Banco, the Padre Morellez set that miniature world at rest, by saying that he would see that it was placed in proper hands.

But the fortune of Dunbar Kennon was the greatest worry to the gossips, as, he being dead, and his wife, who would be the heir?

Then some one went to work, who claimed to know all about it, and traced down the relationship of Valerie Rossmore to Dunbar Kennon, and it was found that she was much nearer kinsfolk than had been suspected.

This worthy seeker into the ancestry of the Kennons and Rossmores, showed, to the minds of many, at least, that Valerie Rossmore's grandmother had been a sister of Dunbar Kennon's grandfather, and she would therefore be the nearest of kindred, and the direct heir to the Cloudlands estates.

Of course this nearly drove the young men who loved Widow Valerie mad, and their name was legion, for the joy of possessing a wife, rich as Croesus himself, and added to it the wealth of a Monte Cristo, was more than they could think over without dread of brain fever.

But suddenly there came a wild thrill through the neighborhood, when one morning the yacht of Don Monte Banco was seen at anchor in her accustomed place near Cedar Hall.

She looked weather-stained, and as though she had been on an extensive cruise, but there was no denying the fact that the yacht was there, and what was more, her master was in his house, having returned during the night.

But where they had been, or what discovered, the crew of the yacht declined to make known, simply saying to all questioners who rowed out to the pretty craft:

"Don Monte knows—ask him."

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE PURSUIT.

KNOWING what he did, from the letter of Zulita, Dunbar Kennon had not started upon any blind pursuit.

He knew who the kidnappers of his wife were, and just where they had taken her.

To find her he must go to the Island Retreat of the Sea Spiders.

He was well aware, as will be recalled, that

they had deserted their old retreat and sought a new one.

His having found the Sea Spider about the West Indies convinced him that they had found an abiding-place somewhere among those islands.

He remembered to have heard Harman, the skipper of the Spray, speak of Mazula's having found an island in the West Indian group, inhabited by a number of pirates who had belonged to the crew of Boule, the Buccaneer, and that this place was held in view as a future resort.

So to this island the Rovers must have gone. Harman was living, he knew, in New Orleans with his pretty wife, Lazuli, once the maid of Zulita, and he would go there to find him.

But he wished also to get more men than he had for his yacht, and so he stopped off New York City while he went ashore and shipped a dozen men.

With these he set sail, not in chase of the Sea Scout, which, inquiry had made known to him, had gone to sea under all sail, but to run to New Orleans and find Harman, who, having been several times to the new retreat when the crew of Boule dwelt there, knew just how to get there.

So the yacht was headed for New Orleans under all the canvas she could carry.

There was a tempest sweeping along the coast, but it was favorable for the yacht, and she went driving along at a terrific speed.

That he might save time, by the run to the Belize and up the river, Dunbar Keunon headed for the nearest port of the Gulf Coast to New Orleans and there made a landing, when a farmer was found to carry him by wagon to the city.

Knowing where to find Harman, he at once sought him at his home.

That young Island Rover, who, as a captive to the Sea Spiders, had been forced to take the Death Oath to save his life, and had been glad to escape when the opportunity offered, especially as he was to have gone with him Lazuli, whom he loved, was found in a pretty little home on the river.

He had invested the money brought with him well and was enjoying life in a quiet way, though often could not but long for a little excitement after the eventful life he had led in the past.

Lazuli was swinging in a hammock on the piazza, while her handsome young husband was engaged in carving out of wood an anchor as an ornament, when Dunbar Kennon approached the gate leading into the little home.

At a glance they recognized him, and the cries of joy that greeted him proved to Dunbar Kennon that he was most welcome.

"But you are ill, señor," said Lazuli, her quick-seeing eyes at once noting the sad and anxious face of their visitor.

"I am ill at heart, señora, for those devils have stolen my wife," was the stern response.

"The Island Rovers?" cried Harman DuBose.

"Yes."

"Have taken the Queen?"

"Yes; they came to my home, where they tracked us."

And Dunbar Kennon told the whole story, from the time when he and Zulita had last dined at the little cottage when he was captain of the packet-brig Rover Queen, to the taking of his beautiful wife from their home by Luka.

Both Harman DuBose and Lazuli listened most attentively and with the deepest compassion, and then the former said, eagerly:

"You have come to me to aid you, Captain Kennon?"

"I have."

"Heart and hand I am with you; yes, and purse, too, if you need gold."

"My dear Harman, I felt that you would aid me; but I need not financial aid, for I am able to give you gold, should you need it; but I am sure that the Sea Spiders have gone to the West Indian Island where Buccaneer Boule's men were."

"Yes, that is where Mazula took them without doubt."

"And you can take a vessel there?"

"By day, yes, señor."

"And will?"

"Against that force, señor, for remember, they have a thousand people, and half are fighting-men."

"Yes; but we can do by strategy what cannot be done by force."

"How mean you, señor?"

"We have one friend there."

"Ah, yes; he who aided you to escape, but whom I do not know of."

"We can run in then after dark, I can seek that friend, and Zulita can be rescued, I am sure."

"It is bold, but like you, señor."

"Will you go?"

"Gladly."

"And so will I."

"But, Lazuli—"

"Don't urge against it, for if a woman should not go I will put on a man's garb; but go I shall, and if Harman dies, I die with him."

There could be no argument against this, and

so it was decided, but Lazuli was told that she need not discard her dresses.

"Now, Harman, I have a fleet yacht, the Zulita."

"She is a small craft, and I have but eighteen men on her all told, so I wish to get a larger vessel, one which would tempt an Island Rover to capture her, you know, and we will need, say twenty-five more men."

"I can get the vessel for you at once, if you wish to buy and the price is not too high for you, as I saw the very craft for sale when on the levee this morning."

"I will take her at any price; but the men?"

"I can get those, too."

"And when can we get off?"

"When do you wish?"

"To-night, if possible."

"Well, we can sail to-morrow, at least; but where is your yacht?"

"In the Gulf."

"Good, we can send a messenger to her to head her off at a certain point and—"

"No, I wish her to await the result in one of the lagoons of the Florida Coast that I know of on the Atlantic side, and if I need her she will be at hand."

"Now, let us go down and take a look at the vessel you speak of; but what is she?"

"A brig of a hundred and ninety tons," and telling Lazuli to get all in readiness for their going, Harman DuBose accompanied Dunbar Kennon down to the tower and rowed out to the brig.

"Is she sold?" asked Dunbar Kennon, when they had rowed out and boarded the brig, which was really a handsome craft.

"No, sir, but I think she will be to-morrow, as we are offering her at a fair price."

"And what is your price?"

"Ten thousand, sir."

"When can I get possession?"

"Within the hour, sir, for I have but two men on board with me, and she is free from cargo."

"I will take her, sir, so make out a bill of sale, for here is your money."

The master of the brig was surprised and pleased; but he was also sorry that he had not said a larger sum, for he saw that Dunbar Kennon was not one to haggle about a thousand or two.

The papers were soon made out, the master selling her for his brother, who had died and left the brig to his heirs, and the money was paid over.

Then the search for a crew was begun by Harman DuBose, while Dunbar Kennon went to purchase stores and all else needed for a cruise.

These were all on board soon after night, and Harman appeared with a score and a half as good men as one would wish to sail with.

Small-arms and ammunition had also been secured, and when Harman had brought Lazuli the brig got under way and headed down the river toward the Gulf.

The run to the meeting-place with the yacht was made in good time and the two vessels stood in company over toward Key West.

Rounding Florida the yacht's crew, excepting her own sailing-master and men, were taken on board the brig, and the Zulita was ordered to a rendezvous near the mouth of the St. John's River, where she was to await the coming of Dunbar Kennon.

Then the brig was headed for a cruising-ground where Harman DuBose was sure that they would fall in with some of the Island Rovers' cruisers.

"We have no cannon, Captain Kennon," said Harman DuBose.

"True, but we will not need them, as I shall capture the cruiser I fall in with by strategy," was the reply.

Harman did not ask the plans of Dunbar Kennon, for he knew he would be told them when they had been fully formed.

Two days after fortune favored the brig, for a sail was reported from the foretop.

"We are just where I know the Island Rovers are wont to cruise, Captain Kennon, and I would not be surprised if yonder sail was one of the Sea Spider's," said Harman DuBose.

"We will soon know, when we are near enough to see her distinctly," was the answer.

The vessel discovered was yet a long way off, but as she rose rapidly it could be seen that the brig had also been sighted, and the stranger had changed his course as though to get a nearer look.

Nearer and nearer the two vessels came to each other until Harman, taking his glass and going aloft after awhile hailed the deck.

"Ay, ay, sir," answered Dunbar Kennon.

"It is a Sea Spider, señor."

"You are sure?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you recognize the craft?"

"It is the Blue Belt."

"What tonnage?"

"One hundred tons, sir, with six guns, two of them eighteens and pivots, and the other four broadside guns and twelve-pounders."

"What is the number of her crew?"

"Fifty men, sir."

"All right, Señor DuBose, and thank you," replied Dunbar Kennon, and after another long

look at the little outlaw cruiser Harman descended to the deck.

"She is heading for us, Captain Kennon, and crowding on all sail," he said.

"Yes, and we must run for it, Señor Du Bois, and our course must be toward the retreat of the Island Rovers, while we must not sail too fast, for this brig is a fleet goer."

Harman Du Bois seemed surprised at the decision of Dunbar Kennon to fly, as he had supposed that he would fight the Sea Spider against all odds.

But he was acting as first officer and so gave the order for the brig to be put away in flight.

CHAPTER XLIV.

A DREAD ORDEAL.

The Island Rovers were a queer people, certainly.

They wished to appear to the world as honest seafarers, while they took every opportunity, that was safe, to add to their wealth.

Their vessels were traders at times, and pirates at other times.

They were smugglers, and dealers in smuggled goods, while they had their depots in seaports for the sale of piratically-obtained booty.

Their vessels were all small, and all wind-chasers.

They could sail away from any cruiser afloat, and they could catch the fleetest of merchantmen and coasters.

When in a dangerous locality they would strip their craft of their large sails, put on canvas that had seen hard usage, give their boats a voyage-stained appearance, and always have a cargo ready to claim that they were South American traders, if they were overhauled by a vessel-of-war.

In nine cases out of ten these cunning tricks saved them, and a war-vessel would sail away, leaving the innocent-looking craft to go on its way, and perhaps render some assistance asked for.

But the next day the little fox of a vessel would run after and catch some vessel richly freighted, rob her, put her crew to death in most cases, or set them adrift in their boats, burn the prize and go with their cargo of booty to their island retreat.

They were suspected more and more each year, by honest craft and vessels-of-war; but when one sea got a little warm for them they would seek another island home.

When Mazula became King, he showed that he meant to do bolder work and become more aggressive, and he quickly won for both his schooner and himself the suggestive name of Sea Spider.

He liked the name, made a flag emblematical of it, with the golden eyes of the Island Rovers in the corners, and the black field of the buccaneer, while he had the spider crimson, to show that his was red work.

The Island Rovers, or Sea Spiders, were certainly a very brave people; but yet they preferred to get their riches by cunning, rather than fighting, if they could.

They therefore took few chances against vessels that might prove dangerous foes, while, if caught in a trap by a vessel-of-war, they never lowered their flag but fought until their craft went down.

Several of their little Sea Spiders had died thus bravely, fighting in a manner that would have surely been true heroism in an honorable cause.

What the future of these people was to be, they had only an indefinite idea of.

When they became what they considered rich, there was a belief among them that they meant to go to some land and settle, founding a colony.

But as no man seems to know when he has obtained riches enough, it seemed that the Sea Spiders were yet a long way off from a consummation of this colonizing intention, for their treasury was already filled to overflowing.

So matters stood when Mazula was King, and upon the day when the little cruiser, reported by Harman Du Bois to be the Blue Belt, was discovered from the mast-head of the brig which Dunbar Kennon had started out in as a means of rescue of Zulita from the power of the Sea Spiders.

When the brig had started to fly it was soon discovered that, though she was very fast, the little Blue Belt was overhauling her.

"I wish, Señor Du Bois, to capture yonder craft," said Dunbar Kennon, quietly, when the two vessels were bowing merrily along, one a league in advance of the other.

Harman Du Bois seemed to think that his captain was going the wrong way about capturing the Blue Belt by running from her, but he said nothing and Dunbar Kennon resumed:

"We have forty-three men all told, and say that the Blue Belt has fifty."

"Yes, sir."

"I have sent, as you see, all but ten men below decks, and they are arming themselves with muskets, doubly charged, and I have arms enough on board to give every one three muskets apiece, and four pistols, with a cutlass, for each."

"Yes, sir; we have a large supply."

"Now, we will let that craft come near us, bring us to and then come alongside, for the sea is smooth, and with this wind he will board.

"Just as he is so near that he cannot fall off, we will give him a volley of musketry, then another, then a third, throw our grapnels, and in the confusion board and carry his vessel.

"He will not be prepared to fight, not expecting resistance from ten men, and we should, if we deliver our musket-volleys with deadly aim, kill or wound half of his crew; while our surprise will be much in our favor.

"What do you say, señor?"

"Captain Kennon, you are a born commander, sir, and we will have the men below on platforms, ready to spring on deck at a call, and the muskets can be loaded and ranged along the bulwark under a canvas drop."

And Harman hastened to prepare the brig for action and get the men into the spirit of the capture by telling them that one of those little cruisers always carried treasure metal upon them.

Nearer and nearer drew the Blue Belt, and all on the deck of the brig admired greatly the manner in which she cut through the waters, almost hidden under the clouds of canvas she had above her decks.

The brig also appeared to have all of her canvas up and was doing her best to escape, but she was not sailed as well as she might have been, and so the little cruiser overhauled her steadily.

As though anxious to possess himself of his prize as soon as possible, the Island Rover opened fire when in range.

But the brig still held on.

It would not do to yield too quickly, Dunbar Kennon thought.

With his glass, though himself in hiding, Harman Du Bois recognized the captain of the Blue Belt and many faces that had been familiar to him among the Island Rovers.

He knew well, as did Dunbar Kennon, that did they fail to capture their foe, their death by torture was assured, while Lazuli, whose anxious face peered up from the companionway must also suffer a like fate.

Harman and Lazuli would at once be recognized as fugitive Island Rovers, while Dunbar Kennon would be known as the young officer who had escaped with the Queen Zulita, and Paul would also have to suffer the doom that would be visited upon his master.

So those four, Dunbar Kennon, Harman, Lazuli and Paul well knew what awaited them should the attack on the Blue Belt turn against them.

But they did not flinch, and when at last the fire of the little Sea Spider forced the brig to come to, they awaited the ordeal without dread.

CHAPTER XLV.

CATCHING A TARTAR.

WHEN the brig, which had found the fire of the Blue Belt becoming pretty hot, lay to, the little Sea Spider rushed on, the captain feeling happy in having caught a fat fly in his iron web, as he thought.

Dunbar Kennon had sent all his crew but two men below, to escape the fire, that he might not have any one killed, and Paul had also been ordered into the cabin.

When the brig hove to, Dunbar Kennon was careful to let her canvas fall, as it had been torn by the shot, in such a way as to conceal all the deck that he could.

Beneath one of these sails quickly crawled a number of men, and others managed to gain the bulwark to leeward, knowing that the cruiser would come up on that side.

Then all waited for the Sea Spider to run alongside.

The brig was rising gently on the swell, and the wind seemed dying down, so there was no reason why the Blue Belt's crew should not board their prize.

Nearer and nearer she came, taking in sail rapidly as she did so, and soon she was near enough to hail.

"Ho, the brig!"

"Ahoy, the cruiser!" responded Dunbar Kennon.

"Who and what are you?"

"An American from Jamaica to New York, and richly freighted."

"Why have you fired on us?"

"You shall soon know, Señor American," was the reply, and then came the order to lay the Blue Belt alongside the brig, and the next moment the grapnels were thrown.

With the clang of the falling iron came the roar of musketry and the rattle of bullets.

"Fire again!" shouted Dunbar Kennon, and another volley followed.

Then there was a scattering fire, and the next the loud command:

"Boarders, follow me!"

Two dozen Sea Spiders had gone down under the unexpected and deadly fire of the brig's men, and not a man of Dunbar Kennon's crew hurt.

Taken wholly by surprise, the pirates had fallen rapidly, ran hither and thither, and hardly knew what to do, when the Americans were upon them.

Their commander had gone down under the first volley, and another officer had followed at the second.

But once they saw a foe to fight, and they were not men to surrender, a rallying cry went up.

Then a fierce hand-to-hand battle was begun, and fortunate was it for Dunbar Kennon that he had good men and true, and the Sea Spiders were in the minority.

Fiercely waged the battle, and the pirates held their own for an instant.

But then Dunbar Kennon was upon them, backed by Harman Du Bois and Paul, the latter wielding a huge cutlass with wondrous skill, and they were driven back, thrown down the hold, hurled overboard, and, seeing that all was lost, the remainder sprung into the sea, to die in its depths rather than at the hands of their foes.

"A grand victory, Captain Kennon," said Harman Du Bois, while he tied up a wound in his hand.

"Yes, and the next will be to use this craft in the rescue of Zulita," was the stern rejoinder of Dunbar Kennon, who had fought like a very demon and shown no mercy, for he had not forgotten that the Island Rovers had shown no mercy to him, nor would to Zulita, whom they had in their power.

He had not received a scratch, though Paul had not been so fortunate, as he had been cut on the forehead with a cutlass-point, though not severely.

The battle was well won, and Lazuli was wild with delight when she saw that her husband was but slightly wounded and the victory was theirs.

Putting the wounded on the brig, under a competent seaman who had acted as second mate, Dunbar Kennon sent him off to the rendezvous to join the yacht, while the Blue Belt, with a crew of twenty-five men, was headed toward the Island Retreat of the Sea Spiders.

"It is my wish to get in sight of the island, Señor Du Bois, about sunset, and there drop anchor, as though we dared not run on in until daylight.

"Will this do?"

"Yes, Captain Kennon, if we have a quiet night; but the approach to the island is so dangerous that the Rovers do not care to venture within three leagues of the Retreat after night."

"Still, as I understand you, you wish to let them see the Blue Belt coming and then drop anchor, as though to await until the morrow?"

"Yes, let me tell you just what my plan has been in capturing this vessel.

"Had a strange vessel attempted to run the channel to the island, the Rovers seeing it would have been alarmed and hence upon their guard.

"But recognizing one of their own cruisers, and seeing her drop anchor, when night comes on and finds her a league or two from the harbor, they will think nothing about it, unless it is that the captain of the cruiser is rash to run in around the rock islands and anchor, risking being caught in a storm there during the night."

"True, señor."

"Well, after nightfall I will start in the gig for the island, taking with me Paul, a couple of oarsmen and yourself, for you have landed there and know about where I could find the fort, over which Señor Ramon is commander, for I might as well confess to you that he is our friend."

"The Señor Ramon?" said Harman with surprise.

"Yes, and he is also the executioner."

"I never suspected this, señor."

"No, but he was the particular friend of Zulita's father, and she threw herself upon his mercy, at the time of our escape, and he freed both Paul and myself, and helped her."

"Now he will still befriend us, and be only too willing to set Zulita free."

"Should he have been discovered as aiding you before, señor?"

"I hardly think it possible; but should it be so, we can discover where Zulita is kept a prisoner, if she is still alive, and can rescue her, for no one will look for a foe there, and it will thus be in our favor."

"If Ramon is there, he can free her; but if he has been slain, then Zulita shall be freed, if she is still alive, and if they have put her to death, then shall I visit such a revenge upon those devils that will drive them off the face of land and sea, for I have sworn it before high Heaven," and Dunbar Kennon's voice rung like a trumpet as he spoke, showing how deeply he was aroused.

"Of course," he continued in his natural voice, "if she is there, and nothing can be done to-night, we can sail out again in the morning, signaling that we see a sail in the distance we are going in pursuit of, and return when Señor Ramon says."

"Do you favor the plan, Señor Harman?"

"By all means, señor, and I believe we can meet with success from its very boldness, and I only hope the Señora Zulita has not been put to death."

"If she has been, then I shall buy, arm and man half a dozen vessels, and with you for pilot, sail in boldly by day and capture that island," was the stern rejoinder.

"It could be done by such a man as you, señor."

"If I rescue Zulita, I shall simply surrender this cruiser to the United States Government and suggest to them that the Sea Spiders' island can be besieged, starved out and taken, while their cruisers can be run down."

"Had I remained in the navy I would have devoted myself to the work, knowing now what they are."

"But put the Blue Belt away now for the island and retreat of the Sea Spiders, Señor Harman," and ten minutes after the pretty craft was on her way, while the brig was heading toward the coast of Florida to join the yacht at the rendezvous, and with it to there await the coming of Dunbar Kennon with good tidings, or ill, as the case might be.

CHAPTER XLVI.

IN DOUBLE DANGER.

MAZULA, the Sea Spider, had sailed away from the island, after the midnight execution of Zulita, and had gone forth, his people supposed, to seek new fields of conquest, that he might drive away bitter memories, for they all believed that the beautiful Queen had been his idol.

A week passed away, and one afternoon the Señor Ramon was seated, as was his wont, under the shelter of a pine tree that grew near his quarters, when his eye fell upon a sail.

"It is one of our cruisers coming in," he muttered.

Soon after he said:

"With this light wind she cannot get in, so will anchor outside the island group until to-morrow."

An hour passed, and looking up again from the book he was reading, he said:

"Why, she is coming in, but cannot reach harbor before dark, so will have to anchor."

"I wonder who the rash fellow is?"

So saying, he got up and walked to his quarters to get his glass.

A look through it caused him to recognize the vessel, for he muttered:

"It is the Blue Belt, and I do not wonder, for Sanda is a rash fellow."

"If a storm should come up to-night, he will have cause to regret his rashness, for his anchors would hardly hold him there."

"Ah! he has dropped anchor, I see; but he had better have remained beyond the chain of islands until to-morrow."

The sun was now going down and lighted up with its rosy rays the pretty vessel, lying a league and a little over off from the main island.

Others of the Rovers had seen the Blue Belt run in that far and drop anchor, and they had wondered at the temerity of Captain Sanda, her old commander, but a reckless fellow.

"He must bring important tidings to thus venture into the archipelago," said one.

"It is a wonder the old fool don't attempt to come right on in the darkness," another remarked.

Soon after the lights on the Blue Belt were seen to shine out, and her presence in her dangerous position was almost forgotten.

But Señor Ramon had not forgotten her being there, and he went out and took a look at the skies before retiring.

There was a murky look about them which he did not like, and he looked toward the little cruiser, for her lights showed where she was anchored.

"Well, if she goes down in the storm I think will come, he has only himself to blame, and it will only be a few pirates less."

So saying, he sat down and coolly lighted his pipe.

If the storm came he wished to know it, and so he meant to watch the result on the Blue Belt.

For an hour he had sat there, twice filling his pipe, when suddenly he saw a form appear before him.

"Señor Ramon?"

The voice was very low and he did not recognize it.

"Who calls?"

"One who owes his life to you, señor."

"I am the American officer you saved from death."

And Dunbar Kennon stepped before the astonished man, who sprung to his feet, half in alarm.

"How are you here, señor?" he asked, quickly.

"I was guided here to your quarters by one who knows the island, and he awaits me yonder in that clump of trees, while three others are in my boat at the rocky arm of the harbor."

"Señor, come at once into my cabin, for should any one come here and see you we are lost."

And Ramon fairly dragged Dunbar Kennon into his cabin.

"Now, señor, now."

"I am here for my wife, Zulita, and the craft anchored a league off the island is the Blue Belt and my prize."

"Where is my wife, Señor Ramon? for, as you served us once, you will again."

"Señor," and the voice of the Rover was most impressive—"Señor, I did serve you, and also the Queen Zulita."

"I owed it to her and to you, and deeply was I pained to feel that she had been captured and brought back here."

"You were not suspected, I hope?" eagerly said Dunbar Kennon.

"No, I was not, and I hold power here as before, for I command the fort and I am the executioner, and hence I was able to again serve the Señora Zulita."

"Then you have done so?"

"Had I not she would have been at the bottom of the sea."

"And she is here?"

"Yes, señor; I have her in hiding in a cave on this island."

"I was commanded to take her out to execution."

"At my request she chose the way I wished her to die, which was to be loaded with chains, carried out in a boat, and for her to spring into the sea at midnight."

"I planned to save her beforehand, for I knew of this cave, lowered a rope down from it into the sea, and then carried her out in the boat dressed in my garb of the Man in Red."

"I had already taken note that the tide set in toward the island after night, and, not wishing to trust to her swimming alone, I put in the boat, under the black velvet pall, a full suit of cork, to serve as a life-preserved."

"This she put on, the chains were thrown into the sea, and she, getting overboard, floated ashore at the point, and then clung to the rope until I came around and drew her up to the cave, where she has been in hiding ever since, while I have been planning to aid her escape, but have been terribly set back to find a feasible plot."

"Now, señor, let me lead you to her, and do you leave this island with her as soon as possible and get your boats out and tow as best you can back toward open water, for there is going to be a storm, if I mistake not."

Dunbar Kennon had listened with breathless interest to the story of Señor Ramon, and seizing his hand had wrung it in silence, for he dared not trust his voice to thank him.

Then he added:

"And you, señor?"

"May I go with you?"

"Heaven bless you, yes!"

"I had determined to remain here, señor, all my days; but after talks I have had with the Señora Zulita, I decided to escape with her."

"I was a wicked man in my early years, and am a hunted man now; but I think I can find me a quiet home and live in peace for the years that are left to me and away from these people."

"I have a duty to perform, señor, which I will tell you of some day, so I will go with you."

"Come, let me lead you to the cave, and while you are there I will return and get the few traps I care to carry with me."

"And Mazul, the Sea Spider?" eagerly asked Dunbar Kennon.

"Was here, but has sailed on another cruise of deviltry, señor, but more of the Sea Spiders after awhile," and Ramon took the arm of Dunbar Kennon and led him from the cabin.

Along the ridge they went, the Rover carrying a coil of rope in his hand, and at last halting at a large tree.

To this the rope was made fast, and Ramon said:

"Señor, descend this rope, over the cliff, for twenty feet and you will come to a shelf of rock, and that will lead you to the cave."

"No, let me go first, for the señora expects me, so your coming might alarm her and spoil all."

"I will be back within a moment," and he swung himself over the cliff and rapidly descended the rope.

In five minutes he was again by Dunbar Kennon's side, and said:

"Now, señor, and I will come for you here within a quarter of an hour."

Over the cliff went Dunbar Kennon, and as he touched the shelf of rock he felt the arms of Zulita thrown about him.

For a moment neither spoke, for both were too happy to break the silence by uttering a word.

They were once more together, and that was sufficient for the present.

Dunbar Kennon had braved every danger, had invaded the supposed invincible fortress of the Sea Spiders, and had found the woman who was all the world to him.

She had escaped death, and was again by his side, so she held no fear.

What had happened to each could be told at another time.

It seemed but a moment to them, in their joy, and then they heard a call from the cliff above.

"Come!"

It was the Señor Ramon.

Zulita went up first, climbing the rope hand over hand with the ease of a middy.

Then Dunbar Kennon followed her and they went toward the clump of trees, where Harman was found anxiously awaiting them.

They all knew their danger should they be discovered, and it would not be surprising if some of the Rovers were wandering about the island.

But down the hill they went, the men ready to fight for life, should they be discovered and meet opposition, for could they gain their boat they could reach the Blue Belt and no craft would come out before dawn to fight them, and with such a start the fleet craft could distance her pursuers, for Mazula's schooner was alone her equal in speed.

All this was thought over, though not spoken, as they went along.

But though they saw several men roving about, they avoided them, reached the boat in safety, and Paul almost shouted for joy as he saw Zulita with his master.

The seamen pulled away with a strong stroke, and the oars being muffled gave no sound.

Harman had the tiller and piloted the boat through the dangerous waters, until within an hour there came a challenge from on board the Blue Belt:

"Ahoy! what boat is that?"

"The Blue Belt," answered Kennon.

"Ay, ay, sir," was the response, and two minutes after they stood on the deck of the pretty craft.

"Now, señor, get your boats out and row toward open water as fast as we can, for there will be a storm strike us before dawn," said Ramon.

The order was given, then boats were put out ahead, with Harman in the bow of the one to starboard, and Ramon in the bow of the one to port, for he, too, knew those waters as well as any one knew them by night.

On went the Blue Belt, the oarsmen knowing their danger now and pulling with strong strokes and noiselessly, while Dunbar Kennon had the helm of the vessel that she might not lose an inch gained through sheering off her course.

Blacker and blacker grew the clouds, and in the distance the muttering of thunder was heard.

Nearer and nearer drew the craft to open water, while the sea began to rise, and the rocks and isles about beat the waters into foam.

"We have passed the Gate Posts, and are safe," cried Harman, and then came the quick order to get the boats up to the davits.

It was not done a moment too soon, for Zulita and Lazuli, standing with arms about each other, beheld the tempest coming down upon them with a fury that was appalling, and knew that had it struck them ten minutes sooner the Blue Belt would have been doomed.

CHAPTER XLVII.

HOME AGAIN.

WHEN the yacht of Don Monte Banco returned to its anchorage, after a two-months absence, as was supposed, in trying to find the kidnapping craft of those who had carried off Zulita, it created great excitement.

The people were anxious to learn just what the Don had done, and those who had hinted that he would never return were anxious to forget what they had said in that regard.

So many were the visitors to Cedar Hall to welcome back the Don, and to learn from him all about his cruise.

He received his visitors in his usual courtly manner, and told his story simply.

He had sailed in chase of the kidnapper, and, lured on by different vessels he spoke, and whose captains reported seeing a craft such as he described the fugitive one to be, to the best of his knowledge, he had gone as far south as the Bahamas, and then, badly worsted in a storm, he had put into a Southern port for repairs.

Feeling that he could do nothing more he had returned, and it was to his deep sorrow that he did not find the yacht of Captain Kennon at her anchorage, and had to learn that he had not come home, nor had aught been heard of his beautiful wife.

Having ventured this much, Don Monte had no more to say, other than to admit that he thought Captain Kennon had come up with the kidnapper, and, with his small crew, had been worsted in the fight that must have followed the meeting of the two vessels.

Having satisfied the curiosity of his visitors, as much as it was in his power to do, Don Monte Banco dismissed the subject in a manner that said very plainly that he did not care to bother himself more about it.

The day after his return he drove over to see Widow Valerie, and the two had a long and interesting talk together.

In fact the Don made himself so very fascinating that Valerie was really won over by him, and when, a couple of weeks later he of-

ferred himself, the lovely woman took occasion to say that she would give him an answer within two weeks.

She had come to look upon Dunbar Kennon as dead, for if he was not, why had he not returned?

Within two weeks it would be three months since he had sailed away in a little yacht, in chase of the kidnappers of his wife, and it certainly looked as though he had gone to his grave in the sea.

Valerie loved riches, and as she had come to believe herself the heiress of Dunbar Kennon's wealth, she thought that she could still further add to her vast fortune by becoming the wife of the Mexican Monte Cristo, as the Don was called.

Thus she decided that if Dunbar Kennon returned, and should bring back his wife, she would wed the Don.

If he returned without Zulita, she would entangle him in her net and marry him.

If he did not return within the next two weeks, she would become the wife of Don Monte Banco.

So she reasoned, and so decided, and the Don appeared to be made happy, for when a woman took time to decide, he argued she would answer in the affirmative.

But Valerie yet loved Dunbar Kennon, after her strange fashion, deeply loved him, and she hoped for his return—without Zulita.

So the two weeks went by, and Don Monte Banco called at Cedar Hall for his answer.

He received it, and it was to the effect that she would marry him.

So he rode home a happy man, and sat up until late enjoying a few glasses with the Padre Morellez.

The Padre enjoyed the drinking, but he did not appear as happy as was his wont.

It was late when they retired, but it was early when they arose, for the servants aroused them with the startling information:

"Captain Kennon's yacht is at her anchorage!"

The Don swore at being aroused, and the Padre muttered something to himself, and both tried to go to sleep again.

But they could not, and so arose, dressed themselves and went out to hear the news, both appearing in the hallway at the same instant from their reception-rooms.

"You have heard the news, padre?"

"Yes, Don Monte."

"What do you think?"

"It is remarkable."

"Can it be true?"

"We can soon see."

They went out upon the piazza and then walked down to a point where the shore of Cloudlands could be seen.

"There lies the yacht, Don Monte."

"Without doubt," and their eyes were upon the beautiful vessel whose going had created such a sensation, and whose coming had been so hoped for.

She was lying quietly at her anchor a mile below the Cedar Hall anchorage.

"We will drive over and congratulate Señor Kennon upon his return, as soon as we have had breakfast," said the Don.

So it was decided, and at quite an early hour for visiting, the Cedar Hall Monte Cristo and the Padre drove over to see the Cloudlands Monte Cristo.

Mark met them at the door, with a smiling face, but before he could tell them that his master had returned, that personage appeared.

"Ah, Don Monte, I am most glad to see you, and you also, padre."

"Come over to congratulate me upon my safe return and the rescue of my wife!"

"Your wife!"

The Don seemed startled at the information, and the Padre also was quite taken aback, for they gazed at each other in dumb silence.

"Ah! I see, with others, you deemed my wife dead; but it was a mistake, and her escape was most miraculous I assure you, for those captors of hers sought to put her to death, for certain reasons of their own; but the one who was to be her executioner took off the irons that were to sink, gave her a cork life-preserver and let her go adrift."

"She, strange to say, got on an island and was taken from it by a pirate craft, one of the Sea Spiders' fleet, a vessel by the name of Blue Belt, and, as I captured the outlaw, I rescued my wife, and she is home again in safety."

"A most remarkable experience, gentlemen, was it not?"

The Don and the Padre thought that it was, and Dunbar Kennon invited them into the parlor to meet Zulita, who was entertaining a friend who had come to visit them, a young clergyman who had been called to take the pastorate of a handsome church which the master of Cloudlands was building for the community at his own expense.

The clergyman had only just arrived, and was a handsome young man whom Dunbar Kennon introduced as Reverend Jonathan Dale, with the remark to the Padre:

"You are of different creeds, Señor Padre Morellez, but as all religions teach of striving

for the same goal hereafter, you should be good friends."

The Padre Morellez knew that they would be, and then greeted Zulita, whom he welcomed home as the Don had done, and both complimented her upon her very fine appearance after all that she had passed through.

The Widow Valerie and Di Donglass were then announced, and with the warmest kisses the former welcomed Zulita home again, while Di started visibly as she was presented to the Reverend Jonathan Dale, while to her lips came the words:

"He is the man who married me to Frank Fairfield."

"But thank Heaven he seems not to know me."

The Don, without the permission of Valerie, now made his engagement to her known, and she got an angry flush from her eyes for so doing.

But Dunbar Kennon and Zulita offered them their warmest wishes for a happy future, and Valerie bit her lips with vexation as she saw that her old lover seemed not to care one jot nor tittle about her intended marriage, as far as she could discover.

Soon after the Don and the Padre took their leave, and Valerie and Di followed in half an hour.

And on the way home they both had something to say to each other, of what had occurred, for the Don said:

"Was that extreme cordiality or satire, padre, in Kennon's manner to-day?"

"I am at a loss to know, Don, for I was going to ask you if he did not seem very cordial, or very full of sarcasm, for I could not decide which it was."

And The Retreat carriage had hardly driven away from the door of Cloudlands, when Di Douglass cried, excitedly:

"Oh, Valerie! that clergyman is the one who married me to Frank Fairfield."

"Can it be?" was the hoarse query, and the beautiful face of Valerie Rossmore grew white with dread.

"It certainly is, Valerie, but he seemed not to recognize me."

"And he must not do so," was the almost savage response of the Widow Valerie.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

UNTO DEATH.

It was some ten days after the return of Dunbar Kennon and his wife to Cloudlands, and yet the excitement had not diminished among the neighbors.

The gossips for once had been forced to hide their diminished heads, and they were fearful that Dunbar Kennon might go hunting for some of the slanders of his beautiful wife.

The Don had kept somewhat quiet of late, and it was rumored that he and Valerie were to be married in a very short while and go off to Mexico to visit his kindred; but, strange to say, though Don Monte Banco claimed to be a good Catholic, he had not availed himself of the services of the Padre, but had asked the Reverend Jonathan Dale to perform the ceremony when the happy affair should come off.

One morning the Don was glad to see the Cloudlands carriage rolling up the avenue to Cedar Hall.

In it were two persons, and Paul was on the box with the driver.

The Don welcomed Captain Kennon and was presented to the heavily-bearded gentleman who accompanied him as Captain Treefoot, of the British service, and a request was made to also see the Padre.

The Don led the way into the library, ordered refreshments and called for Padre Morellez.

When the latter had arrived, Dunbar Kennon said:

"Don Monte, I have something to say to you, and I advise you not to get excited, for I assure you that I have not come here alone, and you must hear what I have to say."

The Don looked nervous, but bowed, and Dunbar Kennon continued:

"In spite of your having disguised yourself by whitening your black hair and mustache, and shaving off your heavy black beard, I know you as Mazula, the Sea Spider!"

"Hold! and you, too, beware, Pierre Gerard, alias Padre Morellez, for every servant in this house is in my pay, and your yacht, Mazula, the Island Rover King, is in my possession."

"You tracked me here, and you and that accursed Frenchman, who put you up to play this game of a Monte Cristo, sought to rob me of my wife."

"You had Luka come here and kidnap her, and then you followed in your yacht to see her put to death."

"Then you returned here to marry Valerie Rossmore, believing that Zulita was dead."

"But she escaped by a miracle, as it were, through this man's linl heart, your executioner, Señor Ramon that was, and into the custody of my friend, Harman Du Bose. I intend to give you, that he may take you and Pierre Gerard to Cuba and deliver you up to the Spanish au-

thorities, as in the waters of Spain your red deeds have been committed."

"Then, Mazula, the Sea Spider, a Spanish fleet will sail for your island, under the pilotage of Señor Du Bose, who now holds possession of your yacht, and the Island Rovers will be scattered to the four winds of heaven."

"Now, Señor Mazula, you will make out a deed of sale of this property to me, for the one from whom you bought it had no right to sell it to you."

"There are the papers, sir, so sign them."

The man was at bay, and he saw that each door and window held two armed men covering him with their weapons.

To his horror he beheld in them his own servants, men from his crew, for Dunbar Kennon had bribed them to act for him, and receive their pardons, or die on the gallows as pirates, and seeing all was lost they had taken the chance for life.

Mazula was not a man to throw life away while there was a chance of escape, so he signed the papers placed before him and then held forth his hands for the manacles, while Pierre Gerard did likewise.

"Now, Señor Ramon, take these men to Señor Du Bose and bid him sail in the Blue Belt to Havana, and deliver them up, and the score of men on Mazula's yacht with them, to the captain-general."

"The Señor Harman Du Bose will then act as pilot against the stronghold of the Sea Spiders, for the captain-general will send a fleet with him, I feel assured, with so much to gain by so doing."

"Now bear them away, for I have other work to perform, and you, Paul, I leave in charge of Cedar Hall for the present."

The two prisoners, gnashing their teeth with rage, and uttering savage oaths, were led out of the mansion, and down to the shore, off which the Blue Belt now lay, with Harman Du Bose on board and the crew of the yacht of Mazula below in irons.

Dunbar Kennon watched the Sea Spider and Pierre Gerard taken on board, and the servants of Cedar Hall follow, for they were to be set free in Havana by Harman Du Bose, and then, as the Blue Belt sped down the river, he was joined by Señor Ramon, and the two entering the Cloudlands carriage were driven over to The Retreat.

As they drove into the gate they saw Zulita's carriage ahead of them, and in it with her were the Reverend Jonathan Dale, Lazuli and Di Douglass.

With a look of surprise at her numerous visitors, Valerie herself met them at the door, and bade them welcome.

She seemed a trifle nervous as Dunbar Kennon presented Captain Treefoot of the British service, but smiled sweetly upon him and remarked:

"Why, this is a delightful surprise from you all."

"I have another surprise in store for you, Valerie, and I wish you to listen calmly to what I say."

"This gentleman, Captain Treefoot, was an officer in the British service once, and he had as a prisoner a pirate chief who offered him a large price to allow him to escape."

"Captain Treefoot yielded, the two were discovered, and the officer took the life of a comrade in escaping."

"So he fled with the pirate and sailed with him for years as a lieutenant under him."

"The pirate had married one of his fair captives, and had a daughter whom he devotedly loved, and who dwelt in New Orleans, where her father visited her at times and lavished upon her everything she could desire, while she knew just who and what he was."

"But this pirate captain came to grief one day, for I was so fortunate as to capture his vessel, and I supposed he was killed."

"But he happened to be ashore, with this officer here, and they escaped."

"As he had lost his vessel, and squandered his treasure, the pirate determined to get gold by another plan than piracy."

"He had been born in this State, of honorable and wealthy parents, and had a twin brother."

"That brother was jealous of him, never loved him, and one night upset the boat they were crossing the river in and supposed he had drowned him, for he did not believe he could save himself."

"But, while one swam ashore, the other, the pirate, clung to the boat, was picked up by a vessel going out to sea, and drifted about the world until he became a pirate."

"It was a cruel destiny, and it made him cruel."

"So, after he had lost his vessel, he came here to get revenge upon his treacherous brother."

"He met him on the river-bank one day, and the brother sprung upon him to kill him; but the pirate proved the Cain in this case, and startled by his resemblance to his brother, he took the clothing from the body, dressed up in it himself, and threw the dead man into the river."

"He had hung about the place for weeks, and knew that his brother, suffering remorse for having, as he believed, drowned him in his boyhood, lived the life of an exile."

"So he went to the old home, palmed himself off readily upon the two aged servants until he got the whole lesson by heart that he had to play as his brother."

"In time he sent for his daughter and brought her to his stolen home as an heiress and ward, and she played her part well, knowing the whole story."

"Then he sent for his pretended son, his nephew, really, and he became engaged to the pretended ward, but, marrying another, was disinherited, and she, *you, Valerie*, got all."

"But I have not done, for you married, as you supposed, Frank Fairfield, when my detectives have discovered for me that he had secretly wedded this lovely girl."

"So yours was no marriage, and yet you claimed to be his widow and sold his estate of Cedar Hall."

"He did not go over the cliff, as you supposed, but ran his horse over, and he went away to escape going to prison and became a gambler, a cheat at cards, too, as he was when a middy in the navy when I forced him to resign, and at last turned thief, was caught, sent to prison and committed suicide in his cell, thus freeing this fair lady of the hateful bond that held her to him, and she has been told all as you know it."

"Now, Valerie Brule, for you are the daughter of Brule, the Buccaneer, once Brule Kennon, my father's brother, you are to leave this country at once and never set foot upon it again, unless you wish also to go behind iron bars."

"You are young, beautiful, and, if you choose, can live a good life, for I will give to you a handsome sum of money to let you live even in luxury."

"Here are the drafts already made out; but first I wish you to sign this deed to The Retreat, for, bought with my money, as your father had no right to will it, it is mine."

"Sign the paper, Valerie, and go your way, and you can sail in the yacht of Don Monte, which awaits you, and thus have it supposed that you have married him suddenly and gone to Mexico, only, as he is none other than the buccaneer chief, Sea Spider, and is on his way to Cuba in irons, you will hardly care to wed him."

"The yacht has a crew on board, and is at your service to go where you will in, and then to dispose of as suits you and get rid of the men as you deem best."

"Now sign the papers, Valerie."

She was like marble, only her eyes seemed on fire.

But she sat down and wrote her name in a firm hand.

Then she said:

"I have been packing my things to go away, so give me two hours longer, that the servants may not suspect anything."

"Ever cautious, Valerie; but you shall have the time asked and more."

"At the end of three hours I will call and escort you to the yacht."

"Farewell," she said, with a sneer and a glance at the others.

They bowed and departed in silence from the room, and three hours after when Dunbar Kennon returned he found her ready, and she was soon in the cabin of Mazula's yacht and on her way whither she willed to go.

CHAPTER XLIX.

CONCLUSION.

CAPTAIN TREEFOOT, alias the Señor Ramon, having exposed Valerie, felt that he had done his duty, and, as Dunbar Kennon gave him the brig which he had purchased in New Orleans, he turned an honest skipper and ran for years between Boston and the Carolinas.

Valerie sailed in the yacht in the very teeth of a gale, and as she was never heard of after and nothing was reported of the little craft ever reaching port, it was supposed that she went down at sea, a fitting fate for the daughter of Brule, the Buccaneer.

Harman Du Bois not only got Mazula, Pierre Gerard and the other prisoners in safety to Havana, but saw them *garroted*, and then acted as pilot to the retreat of the Island Rovers.

But they had heard of Mazula's death, and had scattered in their little cruisers to many seas; but the Spanish fleet captured a large quantity of booty, and also settled the island with honest people.

Upon his return Harman Du Bois moved into The Retreat, which was presented to him by Dunbar Kennon, and became a country gentleman, fond of yachting and other sports.

And Cedar Hall was not left without tenants, for the Reverend Jonathan Dale moved into the beautiful home, and Di Douglass, as his wife, became its mistress after all.

As for Cloudlands, Dunbar Kennon's descendants still live there, and they often now tell the story of the Sea Spider and the Rival Monte Cristos, and point with pride to a lofty monument which their great ancestor erected over his faithful friend and servant, Paul.

THE END.

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